



# Handbook for Teachers at University of Iceland



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KENNSLUMIÐSTÖÐ



Dear University teaching staff,

Outstanding teaching is part of the policy of the University of Iceland. The role of the Centre for Teaching and Learning is to support the implementation of this policy by providing teaching staff, faculties and schools at the University with professional assistance in the development of teaching methods. The publication of this handbook for teaching staff at the University of Iceland is intended to meet the growing interest and needs of University teaching staff for support and education regarding teaching. The handbook is based in part on a comparable book published by Stanford University, although we have sought to localise it and adapt it to the University of Iceland. We would like to thank all those who read the manuscript and offered good suggestions, and at the same time we wish to make it clear that this is a trial publication and that all ideas for improvements are most welcome.

It is our wish here in the Centre for Teaching and Learning that this handbook will come in good use for staff taking their first steps into teaching, but also for all those who share our view that great teaching is at the core of a great university.

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## 1. Effective teaching

### A good teacher

Anyone wanting to become a good teacher must acquire certain skills and adopt a certain approach to teaching and learning. Good teaching is primarily based on expert knowledge of pedagogy and the subject in question, as well as concern for the students. Every teaching method mentioned in this handbook, even the most practical guidelines for lectures or examinations, is intended to help the reader become a good teacher.

### Teaching and research

University teachers may sometimes feel that teaching and research are two competing duties. If you are pressed for time, it can prove difficult to meet both responsibilities to a high standard. Promotion is generally dependent on spending considerable time on research, as well as publishing and presenting intellectual property. Even those who would rather devote themselves to teaching are conscious of pressure to avoid spending too much time and energy on teaching. Despite this, teaching is one of the most important responsibilities of a university teacher; it is important to avoid focusing so much on research that the students get left behind.

Outstanding performances in teaching or research are not mutually exclusive – in fact, there is considerable overlap. Giving a lecture at a conference and answering questions from the audience demands similar skills as teaching. Producing good course descriptions and syllabuses is largely based on the same knowledge as is needed to compose a review or grant application. Both teaching and research

develop an individual's perspective on the subject in question, improve communication skills and the ability to select and organise material in a clear manner.

A teacher's research material can enrich classes. Research and its results may otherwise be incorporated into classes by:

- Using context, referents and discourse from current research.
- Using the results of recent research as part of the course material.
- Introducing both general and subject specific research methods, as well as scientific methods in assignments, e.g. references to books, peer review, experiments, academic criticism, presentations at conferences and grant applications.
- Gradually introducing students to the research community, e.g. by asking them to sign up to an academic mailing list or forum, use online conference data as sources for projects and follow the discourse within the faculty.

Students can also be considered a group of potential research assistants (a group that often contributes a great deal to research projects). Student assistants have enthusiasm, free time and new perspectives on the project. There are also a few downsides; student assistants must be trained and therefore need longer before they can start work. But the rewards can be considerable. Finally, it is worth mentioning that questions in class always have the potential to lead the teacher's research down a new path.

### Active learning

Whether a teacher is standing in front of 300 students in a lecture hall or sitting in a seminar

with 15 students, one of the basic aims should be to ensure that the students actively participate. Students learn more when they are given the chance to actively participate in the learning process, whether through discussions, exercises, criticism or applying methods they have learnt. This contradicts the idea of students as passive receivers of knowledge or information presented to them by the teacher. Methods that encourage active learning should be incorporated into every element when organising a course. These may include, for example, short conversations between students in class, problem-solving exercises or various kinds of group work.

**Active learning supports independent, critical and creative thought.** Students must work with the material in order to strengthen and develop their thinking. You can facilitate this by asking students to analyse and apply material, both in class and for assignments.

- Problem-solving exercises require students for example to analyse information, formulate or compare possible conclusions and solutions and determine the final outcome or interpretation. You can use real examples in class and ask the students to complete the task by themselves or in small groups. You could also use such exercises as the basis for a larger project or examination.
- Other active learning methods that encourage logical thinking or debate. You might present one viewpoint in class and have the students argue for an opposing viewpoint in a short (five-minute) written exercise or class debate. In order to further develop students' skills, you might ask them to

argue both for and against a certain point of view, to 'change their minds' after having argued for something, or to put it in a wider context which could allow for the key ideas of both perspectives.

**Group work promotes active learning.** Group work can be a very effective method when teaching large classes.

- Discussions in smaller groups may, for example, help the students to understand and remember material at the same time as they enhance their communication skills and improve their understanding of how well they can learn from each other.
- Other active learning methods include exercises in peer teaching. For example, you might ask a question in a lecture and give the students a minute to think about it and write down an answer. Then have the students turn to the person sitting next to them and try to convince each other of the right answer. Then give them a moment to write down a revised answer. Gather the conclusions by having the students raise their hands in response to different options. When you have all the answers, you can use the results as a teaching example by explaining the correct answer and showing why the other options are wrong. Teaching material to your peers is a good way to improve understanding: you can make use of this in class through student presentations, study groups and with short teaching sessions to break up the lesson, as was described above.



### **Active learning increases students' participation, enthusiasm and performance.**

Students feel more responsible for their own studies when they get the chance to actively participate in class. For example, you could allow the students to select the discussion topic or come up with ideas as to how to apply a certain concept or method in finding a solution to a challenge that interests them. When students actively participate in class, they assess their comprehension and skills and gain a deeper understanding of the course material than when it is spoon fed to them in the traditional manner.

Teaching staff have access to a collection of books and other material on active teaching methods in the University of Iceland, Centre for Teaching and Learning, as well as various material on the Centre for Teaching and Learning website. The Centre for Teaching and Learning also runs a number of courses and seminars over the academic year, with subjects including teaching methods which encourage active learning.

### **Characteristics of effective teaching**

The methods of effective teachers share certain common characteristics.

#### **Organisation and clarity – the teacher:**

- Is always well prepared, gives clear explanations and simplifies complicated points.
- Uses diverse methods: examples, details, parallels and comparisons in order to make the material understandable and memorable.
- Is aware of human diversity, is careful to ensure the visibility of minorities, gender equality and equality in general.

- Presents clear goals for the course and each class.
- Puts material in context.

#### **Approach – the teacher:**

- Has detailed knowledge of the subject.
- Gives the students a feel for the subject and the origin of ideas and concepts.
- Presents facts and ideas from related fields and compares different theories.
- Discusses perspectives other than his or her own.

#### **Energy and passion – the teacher:**

- Is a passionate, dynamic person who is confident and enjoys teaching.
- Displays a love of the subject.

#### **Communication with the students – the teacher:**

- Stimulates, guides and supervises communication in class.
- Encourages independent thinking and accepts criticism.
- Uses humour in a positive way and is a good speaker.
- Is careful to tackle his or her own prejudices and challenges prejudice and stereotypes.
- Is sensitive to things that engage the students and encourages them to learn.
- Emphasises quality in teaching.

#### **Communication with students:**

- The students consider the teacher to be fair, particularly with regards to course assessment. The teacher does not discriminate based on gender, sexuality, origin, disability or anything else and treats everyone equally.



- Students find the teacher approachable and a source of good advice, even with regards to topics that are not directly related to the course.

### Advice from experienced teachers

Each teacher will have a personal approach to teaching methods and something that suits one person does not necessarily fit into another's teaching style. For several years now, the University of Iceland has awarded a prize for teaching staff who have demonstrated outstanding achievement in teaching. A few of these teachers have shared their ideas on effective teaching methods at a seminar held by the Centre for Teaching and Learning. Their talks can be accessed on the Centre's website, <http://kemst.hi.is>.

**Arnfríður Guðmundsdóttir, Professor of Theology**, believes that a common mistake in teaching is focusing solely on the end goal rather than the journey towards this goal. Learning is, in her opinion, a process rather than a production – acquiring as much knowledge as possible is not the be all and end all, any more than attaining a certain goal or qualification. In their studies, students go through a certain formative process and it is the teacher's job to support them in that. Teaching, therefore, involves communication in which both parties are active participants working together in order to get the most out of each step.

**Ásgeir Haraldsson, Professor of Paediatrics**, believes that the most important thing is to get the students interested in the subject. If they realise how fascinating paediatrics is, the rest is easy. Motivation comes from the subject, looking for answers and a deeper understanding. Combining different methods is effective – assignments, questions and

discussions, academic and practical work. Many paediatricians contribute to the teaching, which makes the material still more diverse and interesting. Ásgeir says that it is extremely helpful to give the students realistic examples to grapple with, which can be discussed from various perspectives.

**Hjálmtýr Hafsteinsson, Senior Lecturer in Computer Science**, says that it is important to set interesting assignments – ones that he would want to complete himself. In Hjálmtýr's courses the assignments, which ideally add something to the course material, involve either answering an interesting question which does not have an obvious answer or creating an interesting programme to share – students are often very keen to make a computer game. Hjálmtýr uses slides where appropriate but generally prefers to use the board, since he believes the students are more involved and remember the material better if they take their own notes. He finds it easier to explain things on the board rather than using slides, easier to respond to questions and the act of writing on the board prevents him from going over the material too quickly.

**Rannveig Sverrisdóttir, Lecturer in Sign Language Linguistics**, is of the opinion that when a teacher is passionate about the subject he or she is teaching, this is apparent to the students and the passion spreads to them. Interesting material can, however, become dry and dull if the teacher is teaching it for the tenth or twentieth time. When Rannveig hears herself reciting something with no 'soul' to it, she knows the time has come to make a change. This change might involve new course material or a different approach, but often reorganising the material or changing the slides

is enough. This generally rekindles the students' interest and is no less important for maintaining the teacher's interest.

**Róbert R. Spanó, Professor at the Faculty of Law**, endeavours to use teaching methods centred on mutual cooperation between the teacher and students. His lectures are not a one-sided transmission of information, but are rather based on questions and problems initially posed without answers to make the students think critically about the teaching material. To simplify often complicated material on legal standards and theories, Róbert also often presents material in a visual context, using pens and a whiteboard to create symbols, circles and other images.

**Sesselja S. Ómarsdóttir, Senior Lecturer in Pharmaceutical Natural Products Chemistry**, puts a great deal of emphasis on keeping learning varied and fun. She tries to break up traditional lectures with short questions, debates, role-playing exercises, little tests and quizzes. She also believes that it is important that students acquire skills in gathering information and knowledge transfer. For example, she has had students research a specific topic and give a public lecture on it.



## 2. Preparing courses

### Organising a course

Whether organising an entirely new course or one based on a previous curriculum, you should begin by defining its learning outcomes. You may then compile course material or select methods that suit the chosen learning outcomes, in order to enable students to get to grips with the knowledge and skills expected of them. It is a good idea to consider the course material and ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the key points that the students should learn and remember?
- What are the most important ideas that students should understand after taking the course (theories, approaches, perspectives and other general topics within the subject)?
- What skills should the students master on the course (competence in a laboratory, problem solving skills, creative skills, writing ability, etc.)?

A course may emphasise one kind of learning outcome over others. Introductory courses often need to cover many facts, whilst very limited professional knowledge might be the key issue in a course for students further along in their studies.

If it seems as though there are too many learning outcomes, it is a good idea to divide them into those that are vital (students must achieve these goals to succeed in the subject) and those that are merely desirable. To determine which outcomes are vital, you might, for example, discuss the matter with colleagues who teach postgraduate courses. If the curriculum has already been well established

you can use older syllabuses or talk to former teachers about what has previously been considered vital in the course and why.

Desirable learning outcomes, however, reflect the teachers' ideals or professional beliefs: Where would they like the students to be at the end of the course? Is broad competence the most important thing, or depth of knowledge? What kind of intellectual and practical challenges should students be able to tackle and solve? Perspectives may differ from subject to subject. Of course you must take practical issues into account, such as how much course material can be covered in one semester, how the learning outcomes tie in with the final learning outcomes for the programme, how prepared and interested the students are, what resources are available in the classroom and your own strengths and experience. For these reasons, teachers may have to teach and review a course several times before being completely satisfied with the results. It is best to emphasise the vital learning outcomes to start off with, but keep your eyes open for anything that could support further study.

### Learning outcomes, material and methods

When the most important learning outcomes for the course have been defined, you can start gathering the resources that will best support students in attaining them. It is worth keeping the following three questions in mind:

- What course material (textbooks, articles, lecture material) do students need access to in order to achieve the learning outcomes?
- What assignments (essays, problems to solve, research projects) and experiences (discussions, experiments, field trips, group collaboration etc.) will

enhance the students' understanding of the course's information and ideas and support their basic knowledge and skills?

- How should students demonstrate that they have attained these learning outcomes? The answers to these questions are the basis of the teacher's assessment system as well as the form and content of examinations, homework and graded assignments. If one of the vital learning outcomes is, for example, improved logical thinking, you must ensure that examinations and assignments evaluate that.

The next step is to select and define reading material, lecture and discussion material, organise student involvement in class, exercises and graded assignments. You can look for inspiration in course material prepared by teaching staff on similar courses at the same time as searching for material that could be compatible with new goals. Teaching staff on new courses have both the freedom and the difficulty involved selecting the course material. The next section will provide some helpful advice on how to handle this.

### Organising a course

It is then time to organise the course in more detail. The work you have already completed, determining the learning outcomes and the most important goals of the course, will guide you in your decisions on course material and resources.

#### Selection of reading material

Deciding whether one text should form the basis of the course is a big decision. A single book rarely meets all the teacher's needs. Students prefer, however, to have a textbook

that applies to the course, providing the book is reasonably well written. One solution is to make the students responsible for getting to grips with the reading material by themselves and then using lectures to present other perspectives, or to fill in any gaps in the textbook.

Since students will object to contradictions between the textbooks and the lectures, you must make sure to explain carefully what you intend to do, why it is useful and how they can best reconcile the material from the lectures with the textbooks in their studies. If you do not assign a single general textbook, it is even more important to consider how reading material is connected to the lectures and to other reading material. It is considerate to the students to minimise book purchasing expenses and take action if there are so many students that they may have to compete for reading material in the library. A solution to this problem is to compile the most important articles into a reading booklet or use Ugla, Moodle or another teaching website to make them available to the students online.

It is important to consider equality when selecting teaching material and ensure that both male and female authors are selected in equal measures, as far as possible. It is also important that teachers familiarise themselves with the gender research related to the course's subject and are able to pass it on to the students. If the articles in question are accessible in the databases to which the National and University Library subscribes, you can direct students to look them up there. This gives the students a good opportunity to practice searching for sources right at the beginning of the course. Factors such as cost and access to course material might seem insignificant but can affect whether a student

participates in the course or not.

Other than required books, reading material can comprise academic articles that reinforce points that appear elsewhere or present the topic from another perspective. Handouts and notes from the teacher can also be helpful for students, for example in reinforcing or summarising the lectures. Students will also make use of further reading if you provide ways to do so. The list of further reading should indicate which books students can use as resources when working on assignments or sources for essays, which sources are helpful for students who may lack the necessary basic knowledge in the field, as well as those who wish to learn more about certain topics.

### Organising of topics

Teachers generally have a good understanding of the primary topics they have to cover in the course. Conscientious teachers should familiarise themselves with the major textbooks in the subject, academic discourse and the syllabuses of colleagues teaching other courses in the subject. What is the best way to organise these important topics? There may seem to be an obvious solution – for example, structuring the course according to chronology or the way the material is organised in the textbook. You might also consider a clear ordering of topics which progresses from an overview of the material to specific areas, switching between theories and application, or grouping topics depending on the techniques, skills or methods that need to be applied.

No matter how you choose to organise the material, you must ensure that the course is logical. For example, you cannot expect students to form an overall view of the subject before they have learnt to compare different perspectives. Likewise you cannot expect them

to compare different perspectives before they have learnt to analyse arguments. Nobody expects students to plan experiments designed to test complex hypotheses before they have developed basic research skills by solving simpler problems. The ordering of topics should always form a logical whole and support the development of key ideas and those skills which students need to attain. By explaining the structure of the course and the ideas behind it, the teacher can help the students get to grips with the course material.

### Classwork

How is time best spent in class? By giving a lecture or devoting a considerable chunk of time to something else? Although lectures are a traditional teaching method, they can reduce active learning in students. Other methods require interaction with the student group. Does it make sense to hold short discussions each class or have separate discussion periods? Could guest lecturers or field trips provide students with particular insight into the topic? Would role playing help students understand certain topics? Is there a film or other visual material addressing the topic? Peer teaching can be used as part of the discussion, whereby students teach each other after having carefully researched material themselves in groups and prepared a presentation. Students remember and understand course material much better when they have explained or taught it themselves. It is a good idea to explain the value of such methods to the students; for example, you might spend part of class and your office hours guiding students and preparing them for peer teaching, so they don't view it as a way for the teacher to get out of teaching duties.



### Structure of the course

Finally, you must determine the exact structure of the course from week to week: the ordering of discussion topics, reading material, assignments and examinations. Bear in mind that holidays and major events in the students' social lives can affect their attendance or ability to complete assignments. Students have different family situations and their home responsibilities may differ, e.g. depending on gender, and a badly organised course can be challenging for people with a lot of responsibility. This could lead to undesirable gender discrimination.

### Evaluation of the syllabus

Once a draft of the syllabus is ready, you must carefully review it and perhaps even ask a fellow teacher to read it over and give an opinion. Is the syllabus substantial – is there enough material to challenge the students intellectually and hold their interest? Is it flexible – is there leeway to take any possible suggestions from the students into account? Is it coherent – is there a clear relationship between lectures, reading material and assignments? Are the primary topics covered in the course clear? At the end of the course, will students have acquired not only knowledge but also new skills and competences?

### Syllabus

When the outline of the course is completed, you can start preparing the syllabus for the students. At a minimum, it should include:

- A course description, including the aims of the course and learning outcomes.
- Prerequisites for the course.
- A list of assignments, a short description of each and the deadlines.

- A description of examinations (their format and content) and examination dates.
- An explanation of grading, attendance requirements and other factors that will affect the final grade.
- Office hours and the location of the teacher's office, telephone number, email address and information on where to find the teaching website for the course. Similar information should be provided for assistant teachers on the course.

You might also pique the students' interest by including more detailed information about the course, for example the titles or discussion topics for each lecture. You could define each lecture with a question that you will attempt to answer, such as: "What does it take to win a Nobel Prize?" (a lecture on the history of modern science) or "Why does tap water taste different in Akureyri from in Reykjavík?" (a lecture about water quality).

You may also leave one or two lecture periods undefined to give students the chance to choose a discussion topic or have time to catch up if necessary. Some teachers go further and include a short overview of the key points or discussions for each section of the course. Ideally, syllabuses should be prepared well in advance so that students are able to organise themselves. This applies not least to students who require disability services and special accommodations.

### Students

Who are the students? What is their motivation for selecting the course? What basic knowledge and skills can you expect them to possess? What is the background and social status of the students? Here you should consider sex, sexual

orientation, gender identity, disability, origin, nationality, class and other factors. Different backgrounds and experiences can affect people's circumstances and approach to the course and you must consider diversity in your teaching and organisation.

The success of the course depends not only on how well it meets the faculty's requirements or the teacher's personal goals, but also how well the course material is tailored to the goals, knowledge and backgrounds of the students.

Many things can affect who attends the first class of the semester and how they feel there. For example, simple factors such as the timing (early in the morning or in the afternoon, autumn or spring), the subject of the course and whether it is mandatory or elective. To gain an understanding of the prospective student group, you can talk to students coming to the end of their studies or teaching staff who have taught similar courses. By considering many different factors, you can imagine the needs and possible perspectives of the students.

Of these factors, the position of the students in their studies is the most important. Are you guiding the students in their first steps into the academic field or adding the finishing touches to their academic training? Can you assume that the students on the course have at least a basic interest in the subject, or must you try to convince a group of curious, undecided students of the merits of the field? Of course there is a difference between the motivation, backgrounds and habits of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Postgraduate students often share a common basic knowledge of the field and are familiar with its terminology. They are used to working independently and contributing something to the course. Those who are approaching the end of their undergraduate studies may share these

characteristics with postgraduate students.

A room full of new students, however, presents an interesting challenge. Some students are investigating different career opportunities: the course may affect whether someone decides to become a chemist, linguist or anthropologist.

In introductory and lecture courses, it is especially important that teachers share their passion for the subject and its importance, in general and as part of the programme. This applies in particular to students who see the course only as a stepping stone to other courses (as a medical student may see a chemistry course, for example). If this is the case, it is worth putting particular emphasis on interesting examples and possible applications, as well as creating an environment in which students feel that they are responsible for their own studies.

In all courses, you must take into account the diversity of the student group – you must not operate on the assumption that everyone is white, heterosexual, non-disabled and Icelandic and you must not presume that the subject is better suited to one sex or the other. Such thinking is not conducive to success if you intend to interest the students in the field – it will lead rather to marginalisation and exclusion.

First-year students often have wildly differing backgrounds; in such case, you must teach them the terminology of the field, methodology and approaches gradually. For a diverse student group, it is a good idea to have regular assignments and quizzes to monitor student progress. Some teachers hand out a list of questions in the first class of the semester in order to better get to know the students' backgrounds and interests. Others explain to the student group that diversity should be



celebrated and that equality will prevail inside the classroom. Such discussions set the tone and let the students know that everyone is equally valued and recognised and that class will be a safe space. It is important to continue to evaluate their needs over the course of the semester – this will be repaid with increased enthusiasm and better performance on the part of the students.

## Practical points

### The textbooks collection

Teaching staff may, in connection with courses they teach, request that certain works be added to the textbook collection. For the duration of the course, the works in question will be either available for use within the library or for one to seven-day loans. The textbooks collection is located on the fourth floor of the National and University Library of Iceland. It also includes a place to store photocopied reading material related to current courses.

Loans from the textbooks collection are subject to the presentation of a library card, the same as other library loans. Library cards for the National and University Library are provided for students and teaching staff at the University of Iceland free of charge. The email address for the textbooks collection is [namsbok@bok.hi.is](mailto:namsbok@bok.hi.is).

### Book orders

Orders for foreign textbooks should be sent to the purchasing manager at Bóksala stúdenta (the student bookshop), with information on the course (number, name and start date) and the title, author, publisher and ISBN of the book(s).

Orders for Icelandic textbooks should be sent to the purchasing manager for Icelandic books with the same information. Those wishing to fill out an order form and submit it in the shop can find the form on the bookshop's

website, [www.boksala.is](http://www.boksala.is). The email address for the student bookshop is [boksala@boksala.is](mailto:boksala@boksala.is).

### Return of grades

The marking of final examinations shall be conducted with the view that grades shall be returned within the time period specified in the legislation and regulation on the University of Iceland, as well as the provisions of the Administrative Procedures Act no. 37/1993.

These rules apply to all examinations, theses and assignments which count toward course assessment. Should assessment involve something other than a written or oral examination, the start date of the marking period for theses or assignments shall be determined by the last examination day of the semester.

The faculty office shall send an email to all supervisory teachers and other teaching staff responsible for composing and marking examinations, at least 10 days before the first examination date giving information on the course title, name of the supervisory teacher, examination date and deadline for returning grades. Teaching staff are required to pick up the examination papers the day after the examination.



## Course catalogue

All information on programmes and their structure can be found in the University of Iceland course catalogue, which is published online annually. Teaching staff are responsible for certain information on courses appearing in the course catalogue, such as a course description, information on textbooks and other reading material, assessment and learning outcomes. It is vital that the information given there is accurate, since it can be extremely important for students, not least those who require special accommodations or disability services, students who have family responsibilities, and those who are less well off and want to find ways to spread the expenses of the programme over a longer period. Teaching staff are provided with editing access to this information for a limited period towards the end of the year, as determined by the editor of the course catalogue. Faculty contacts shall review and approve any information saved by teaching staff.

The editor of the course catalogue shall send all teaching staff a notification in the autumn reminding them to review information on those courses for which they will be responsible in the next academic year. The notification shall include brief guidelines on the most important steps and points, as well as directing staff to detailed instructions for updating course descriptions and other relevant information.

Teaching staff can access operations related to the course catalogue on the course teaching website via: Operations > All operations > Course Catalogue. Course descriptions can only be updated during a certain period, but learning outcomes can be changed at any time. It is worth mentioning that when learning outcomes are updated, they only change in the relevant edition of the course catalogue. For example, if

a teacher sees something unusual in the learning outcomes of a course he or she is currently teaching and corrects them on the course's teaching website, they will not be automatically changed in the course catalogue for the previous academic year or the next. Learning outcomes must be updated each semester.

## Teaching support

The organisation of a course might easily be seen as an individual project. Nevertheless, there is a range of support available for teaching staff. Examples include assistant teachers, faculty office services and the Centre for Teaching and Learning. It is a good idea to bear these options in mind at all stages of preparation and teaching.

## Assistant teachers

Many teachers at the University of Iceland have positive experiences of support from assistant teachers. Their contribution could be put to better use in the organisation of courses, though. Even experienced teaching staff sometimes do not meet their assistant teachers until teaching starts. It is better to meet assistant teachers a little before the start of teaching, clarify the goals of the course and your expectations, and ask them to consider how they might best contribute to the course. It may transpire that the assistant teachers have some good ideas for further reading, suggestions for assignments and grading, and insight into how complex material might be explained.

It is important to give assistant teachers a chance to learn the art of teaching. You might ask them whether they are interested in gaining experience in any specific teaching method (e.g. giving lectures or organising new assignments) beyond their traditional responsibilities. It is not

enough to encourage assistant teachers to take the initiative; you must also provide them with the necessary support.

In many cases assistant teachers are young and inexperienced people who may not even be particularly knowledgeable in the specific material to be taught. They may have quite vague ideas about what is required in preparing lectures, presenting research methods and marking assignments. If the relevant faculty does not offer introductory talks for assistant teachers, teaching staff may hold their own. The University Centre for Teaching and Learning runs regular courses for assistant teachers and advice may be sought from experienced assistant teachers.

Whether assistant teachers are responsible for planning experiments, maintaining the teaching website or mailing list for the course, preparing lectures, leading discussions, marking assignments or anything else, they must receive adequate information. New assistant teachers may also be unfamiliar with the faculty's curriculum, guidelines for grading or administrative responsibilities. Therefore, you must provide them with all the relevant information.

It is important for all teachers to consider their methods in selecting assistant teachers and whether all students have an equal chance of being chosen. It is especially important that no specific group is excluded, e.g. one sex, people of foreign origin, etc. You must think about whether the requirements for assistant teachers are possibly gendered – if the individual is supposed to be gentle, considerate and helpful towards the students, these are ideas that are perhaps more associated with femininity and it is likely that women would be chosen. A good piece of advice for teachers would be to pick men and women as assistant

teachers alternately, also taking particular care to ensure that other variables such as e.g. disability or gender identity (transgender people) do not rule anyone out.

Assistant teachers have other academic responsibilities, such as their own studies or research projects. It is important to make their experience as rewarding as possible and to share teaching and marking responsibilities equally amongst the assistant teachers. You could hold regular meetings to discuss how their work is going and any questions or problems that may arise. You should look in on classes taught by assistant teachers and offer helpful and honest suggestions afterwards. You must inform them of services available from the Centre for Teaching and Learning, such as recording of classes and mid-semester teaching evaluations. In order to maintain a two-way relationship with assistant teachers, you might ask them to give you their opinions on your performance in class.

Assistant teachers may also, due to more frequent contact with the students, have a better understanding than the teacher of their interests or concerns. Besides the obvious responsibilities of assistant teachers, their contribution can enrich teaching in many ways.

### Preparation for the first class

A common worry, especially amongst new teaching staff, is that the first class will be a complete disaster. Inexperienced teachers may worry that they will forget what they were going to say, that their examples won't work, that they won't be able to answer the students' questions or even that they will have to wake the students up at the end of the class. Even experienced teachers experience stress and nerves before the first class of each semester; no two classes are the same and the first day of

the semester often brings unexpected situations and challenges. It is therefore important to prepare the first class carefully. With good preparation, the first class will set the tone for what is to come and the teacher's expectations. The teacher's preparation and approach are infectious – students who notice the teacher's passion are more likely to devote themselves to the subject and put more effort into the course. This section will discuss strategies for both new and more experienced teaching staff.

### The start of teaching

A strong start makes a difference and there are various things you can do to prepare for the first class of the semester. Ideally, you should try to sit in on at least one class in a similar course beforehand and talk to the relevant teacher about problems that have come up in that course, as well as things that have gone well. You can talk to experienced teachers or postgraduate students within the faculty to obtain information and advice. You must visit the classroom before teaching starts and familiarise yourself with the lighting, technology options and layout of the room. It is amazing how quickly your technical know-how can abandon you when you try to get the hang of a new piece of equipment in front of a room full of students. It is also a good idea to have a look at the classroom with ideas about universal accessibility in mind, ensuring that people with any kind of disability can access the room and everything in it. Another good idea is to look over the classroom with your gender glasses on; e.g. are there only pictures of old white men on the walls? What advertisements are on the wall? Are they appropriate? You must consider the effects of pornification. Teaching staff may then seek to change the appearance or layout of the classroom, or at least discuss it with the

students and minimise the invisibility of certain groups instead of allowing it to seem normal.

Even highly experienced teachers find it helpful to prepare carefully for the first class of the semester. Students must get a sense of the course as a whole: its content, methods, core theme and goals. Teachers must be ready to get the students interested in the course material and at the same time present a clear picture of what is required of them. Their concern for the students must be evident from efforts to learn their names and their reasons for selecting the course in question. You must provide information on office hours and explain why the students should make use of them.

You must go over the topics to be covered on the course, explain how they are related to other courses in the subject and thoroughly review the syllabus. When discussing the syllabus and structure of the course with students, it is important to explain how lectures and discussion periods or practical classes – if they are part of the course – fit together and complement each other. Teachers must be prepared to answer questions on course assessment and examinations and to recommend back-up reading material if students say that the textbooks are sold out or unavailable in the student bookshop.

It is important to make an effort to learn the students' names as quickly as possible, even in a large group, since students will generally put more effort into their studies if the teacher knows them. It is also important to learn the names of those who don't speak up as much – it is often the case that male students and those who speak good, clear Icelandic express themselves more. Students can find it empowering when the teacher knows their names. This is true not least for those who generally are not afforded much space in

groups and discussions. For large groups, teachers may suggest a certain seating plan for the first lectures; this will make it easier for the teacher and the students to learn each other's names. You might also encourage students to upload pictures of themselves to Ugly or the course teaching website. There are other options to help teachers and students learn each other's names quickly and easily. For example, you might ask students to wear name tags for the first weeks or have them on their desks. You might have the students write their names on a sheet of paper along with a few sentences on why they have decided to take the course and which other course at the University they have found most useful and interesting so far. In this way, teachers can get a sense of students' interests, expectations and values.

Although some teachers devote the first class solely to such groundwork, it is recommended that you start discussing the course material or relevant information right away. Teachers thereby let the students know that they value their time and expect progress in every class. Since some students are still searching for courses that suit them at the beginning of the semester, they will get a better impression of the nature of the course if you start looking at the course material right away and indicate your methods. Many new teachers prepare too much material for the first class, but it is better for your self-confidence to have too much to do rather than too little. Factor in time to answer questions from students. Most questions from students in the first class are concerned with practical matters, such as times and locations, the price of textbooks, reading material and where to access it, course assessment, grading, assignment deadlines and examination dates.

There are many different possible approaches to the first class of the semester. One option is to relate the new course material to something the students are already familiar with – knowledge or experience they have acquired from other courses or elsewhere. This reduces any anxiety they may have about tackling new material and increases their interest in discussion topics that they have not yet realised could be useful to them.

These methods and others ought to encourage a pleasant start to the semester and even if the first class doesn't go according to plan, there is no reason to despair. Students are quick to forgive when they see the teacher making an effort. Students are also willing to give their opinions on improvements that could be made – you can also look to the Centre for Teaching and Learning for advice.

## The first day

### Preparation

- Location of the classroom: how convenient is it? Is it accessible to everyone regardless of, e.g., disability?
- Prepare all technical components in advance.
- Book orders at Bóksala stúdenta, further reading in the textbooks collection at the National and University Library, photocopies of reading material.
- Meetings with assistant teachers, if relevant.
- Syllabus, including the following:
  - Name, location of office, office hours, telephone number and email address.
  - The same information for assistant teachers.
  - Course description.



- Overview of lectures or discussion topics for each week.
- Reading material and where to find it.
- Prerequisites for the course.
- Timetable for examinations, essay deadlines and other assignments.
- Grading, along with information on whether there is a penalty for late submissions, and if so how large.
- Discussion of academic methods and integrity.
- Information on where students requiring disability services should seek assistance.
- Information on where to find further reading, useful resources and instructions.

### Basic points

- Introduce yourself and have the students introduce themselves.
- Discuss the course schedule and learning outcomes.
- Explain your choice of reading material and how it relates to the lectures.
- Encourage the students to ask questions.
- Introduce material that shows the nature of the course and relate it to other courses or experiences with which the students are familiar.



### 3. Teaching methods

Excellent teaching can take place both inside and outside a traditional classroom setting. This section will discuss some practical advice concerning teaching environments, e.g. in lectures, laboratory sessions, discussion periods – even in the teacher’s office hours. More detailed advice on teaching can be sought from the staff at the Centre for Teaching and Learning, or from fellow teachers who have developed their own methods.

## Lectures

Lectures have long been one of the main components of university teaching. At the University of Iceland, most lectures are at least 40 minutes long despite the fact that students have a much shorter attention span. A conventional lecture can be a good way to impart information, introduce new material and sum up conclusions. However, not everyone is suited to keeping an audience’s attention for such a long time. Although the subject of the lecture may seem interesting to the person talking, even the most interested audience members will regularly lose the thread and might have trouble picking it up again.

The best lectures, as with other good speeches, get the students to think about important issues or topics in an original way, putting them into the context of concepts and ideas. They do more than ‘cover the material’. A good lecture presents a specific point of view. Lectures, however, are not a perfect medium for complex academic arguments or extensive reviews of information. The aim is to explain the material, not confuse the students with complicated details or too much information. Ideally lecturers should be able to adopt a relaxed, conversational tone, allow themselves to think out loud and tackle material as soon as

it is introduced. It is generally a mistake to rely completely on a rigid script, which can lead to a monotonous and bland performance.

## Lecture preparation

Careful preparation increases lecturers’ self-confidence, improves their manner and ensures the lecture makes a deeper impact. When you have limited time to prepare, it is best to concentrate on the following points:

- An introduction that clearly indicates the subject of the lecture.
- An outline including primary points and examples.
- A conclusion that ties together all the threads of the lecture and places it in a wider context within the course.
- Material to be used if the technology in the lecture hall should fail to work for whatever reason.
- If you plan to use a demonstration in the lecture, you must practice it beforehand and ensure that all materials are well organised and in good order.

## Manner

It is worth keeping a few basic points in mind:

- Avoid reading the lecture out word for word and make eye contact with the students as often as you can.
- Speak slowly and clearly. If the students are busy taking notes, go even slower or take a pause to allow them to write things down.
- Face the students rather than the board, projector screen or computer.
- Pause to think if you lose the thread rather than meandering on to no purpose. A short break can often provide students with a welcome



opportunity to amend their notes or contemplate the material covered.

- It can be a good idea to test the way your voice carries in a new classroom by asking a friend or acquaintance to sit at the very back and listen. A room full of people can muffle sound and you may therefore need to use a microphone. Microphones are available in many of the larger classrooms. The lecturer is then free to move around the room.
- Record a lecture, e.g. using eMission, and listen to it. You might also ask an employee at the Centre for Teaching and Learning to record a video of the class for evaluation purposes.

The Centre for Teaching and Learning offers regular teaching courses and advice on teaching technology.

### Structure and speed

The structure of a lecture can make all the difference in whether students remember or understand the material. It is important that teachers do not try to do too much and that they indicate – using emphasis, repetition and summaries – the main points and how they are related. Good lecturers spend most of their time on examples, comparisons, repetition and questions. You can use the following criteria to improve your lectures:

- The content of a lecture should not need more than three to five main points. More than five main points provide enough material for more than one lecture.
- Accomplished lecturers often begin by briefly outlining the points they intend to discuss or by posing a question which the lecture will then answer. They then expand on these points using examples

and discussion. Finally, they end by revisiting the main points they have covered.

- Although repetition is problematic in writing, it is vital for verbal presentations. It is therefore a good idea to repeat points which are particularly important using interesting examples and demonstrations.
- Most students can only concentrate for five to ten minutes at a time. During this period, you can present the main ideas in a brief and concise manner and then quickly review them in order to keep the students focused on the material.
- After each quick review you must clearly indicate that you are moving on to the next section. You can organise discussions, questions and answers, even breaks, around these main sections of the lecture.
- It can be a good idea to use demonstrations, techniques that encourage active student participation and multimedia material at regular intervals throughout the lecture in order to keep the students focused.
- Puzzled faces in the audience indicate that you need to repeat material in a simpler way, give examples or give students a chance to ask questions. If everyone is busy scribbling down notes, it is worth slowing down and summarising recently covered points.
- The lecture is gone after it is over – unless it is available online. Students need time to think, since they can't rewind or replay parts of the lecture. It is therefore a good idea to pause after

complicated points and ideally keep your language as simple as possible.

### Coherence

Students desire clarity; they want the progression of the course to be clear and they want to understand how each lecture fits into the course as a whole. In order to help the students visualise the structure of the course, you must emphasise the coherence between individual lectures. The following ideas may be useful in this respect:

- It is a good idea to begin each lecture by connecting it to material covered in the last class.
- How does the lecture relate to material from the textbooks? Have the students noticed this connection? Lectures can be used to bring textbook material to life using examples, multimedia and discussions; broaden or narrow the discussion area as appropriate; support the perspective of the reading material or present a different perspective.
- You must connect lectures with assignments by ensuring that students have acquired the knowledge they need to complete assignments and that they understand how the lecture topic relates to written assignments, problem solving or experiments. Homework should give students a chance to apply the knowledge they acquired in the lecture.
- At the end of a lecture you might pose questions or touch on points that will be covered in the next lecture.

One minute's writing is a technique you can use to assess students' thoughts on the lecture. The students have one minute at the end of class to answer two questions: first, what was the most

important point of the lecture and second, is there an important question that has been left unanswered. The students hand in their answers to the teacher, providing immediate feedback on the lecture and any points that need to be covered in more detail or have yet to be addressed.

### Context

Students appreciate it when teachers connect material with other courses, other ideas within the field and everyday problems and examples. They want to know how, in time, they can apply the ideas they have been learning about. The material may have a high appeal for the teacher, but the students won't necessarily agree.

Just like demonstrating a theory in the context of its application and history, you can get the students interested by demonstrating the relationship between the course subject and other fields. Some students like it when teachers take examples from different academic fields, because then they feel they are learning not about isolated material but rather a foundation of knowledge which they can use if they decide to focus on another field in the future. Such examples will help the students see the connections between the different courses they are in. The ability to apply the primary rules from one field to another is in itself very valuable. It can also form the basis of an academic or scientific understanding vital for student progression.

### Diverse formats

There are various techniques you can use to break up the lecture format, with the goal of increasing active participation in the classroom. Aside from questions from the audience, these include:

- Small tasks which the students complete alone or in pairs.
- Short discussions, either amongst the group as a whole or in pairs or small groups.
- Short experiments, role playing or debates in which the students participate.
- Examples or experiments that require the students to predict the outcome before you reveal the results.
- Make sure to consider diversity when providing examples, e.g. talking about homosexual couples, people of foreign origin, people with disabilities and the sex that is less frequently seen in the field or would be considered less likely to be involved in the example you are giving.
- Make sure you use both the pronouns 'he' and 'she'. This is a good way to make sure that students from different groups feel that they are involved in the subject, but also to raise the visibility of these students in general. Often, students are trained to think of everybody as white, heterosexual and able-bodied; women doing 'feminine' activities and vice versa. It is nice to surprise students by challenging these ideas. It can often broaden the discussion and better prepares students for the diversity of society.
- Multimedia of various kinds.

A few engaging examples, problems or proofs can be especially useful for students when their energy or attention span is limited. If you notice that the students' concentration is dwindling, it is a good time to offer a change. As well as rekindling the students' interest, techniques like

this can give students a chance to use what they have learnt and the lecturer an idea of what they are thinking. Here you might mention the example of the Icelander Ahmed who gets into a quarrel with Adam, who is of foreign origin. Or a homosexual couple who are getting a divorce.

Remember to encourage all students to participate and make sure not to pay more attention to one group than another. If you find yourself in a situation where one group participates less in class, e.g. women or people of foreign origin, it is a good idea to ask students to prepare with questions or thoughts for the next class. In this way you can ensure that students who lack the self-confidence, opportunity or courage to speak up can arrive well prepared to take part in the discussion. In very large groups, you can ask students to take it in turns to prepare discussion questions in order to ensure that everyone participates and actively learns.

### Questions

Teachers should make a point of encouraging students to ask questions, though opinions may differ on how they want them to be asked. Some teachers believe that students learn better if they are free to interrupt the teacher with questions, whilst others find this distracting. Let the students know whether they can ask questions in the middle of a lecture or whether they should wait until the end. Make sure you factor in enough time for questions and answers.

- Use simple wording for your questions: "What parts of the material are still not clear?" or "What do I have to explain again?" or "What points are you wondering about that I haven't addressed yet?" or simply: "I would like to hear your comments and questions."

- Make sure that you understand a student's question before you embark upon a long explanation. Repeat the question and ask the student to confirm it if necessary.
- In large classes, it is a good idea to repeat questions so that all the students can hear what is being asked. If distance students are going to be listening to a recording of the lecture, it is also a good rule to repeat students' questions so that they are clearly audible on the recording.
- Factor in two or three minutes to answer questions at points in the lecture when you switch between topics. Give the students the whole allotted time to think, even if nobody asks any questions. This will support your promise to answer questions and encourage students to look over the material in a critical frame of mind.
- There is no need to be distressed if you don't know or remember the answer to a question. You might offer to find out and answer the question in the next lecture or on the course teaching website. You could also ask the student in question to research the matter and provide the answer in the next class. You could try to find the answer right away with the students, if you have time and the question is relatively simple.
- If students seem embarrassed to be asking about basic points, mention that you are glad they thought to mention an issue that a lot of people were probably wondering about. Such praise is particularly effective when people

who seldom speak up have something to say.

- Give other students the chance to answer a student's question. This technique undermines the impression that the teacher is all-knowing and makes the classroom into a common study area for students and the teacher.

### Personal lectures

Good lecturers often seem to be chatting with a few acquaintances although they are actually talking to many hundreds of people in a lecture hall.

- Organise lectures such that they contain examples and material that you find interesting, as well material that you expect the students to relate to in particular. Many teachers use references to popular culture or recent events in the University community to good effect.
- Speak directly to the students and observe the audience. Pay attention to body language and other indirect responses. Do the students seem to be paying attention, enjoying themselves – are they confused, distracted or maybe bored? Are they taking notes, asking questions or yawning?
- Respond to the students' reactions – if they laugh, wince or seem confused, you can talk about that or the thing that evoked that reaction. This shows that the teacher cares about the students' reactions to what is happening.
- Be willing to change your approach if the students don't understand the material. Improvise and try to make the best of the situation.

- It is appropriate to occasionally mention your own interests and experiences that relate to the material. Students are curious about their teachers and if they share personal anecdotes related to the material, the students may be more interested in it and put more effort into the course.
- If students react in a particularly positive or negative way to part of the lecture, it is a good idea to take some time after class to think about what caused this strong reaction.

In order to keep students focused on the material, you should concentrate on the following general points: teach subjects that interest you, or find something interesting in the course material; allow your teaching style to reflect your personality rather than trying to copy some other successful lecturer, and be aware of what is actually happening in the classroom rather than what you expected or hoped to happen.

### Multimedia and visual formats

Many lecturers use audio or visual elements to help them structure, enliven, vary or support their presentations. Below are the benefits of the most commonly used teaching aids and advice on how to use them.

#### Board

It can be a good idea to use the board for actively communicating with the audience. Writing on the board is also a good way to demonstrate a certain process.

- Avoid talking to the students whilst writing on the board. Breaking eye contact with the teacher reduces the students' focus and there is also the

danger that they won't be able to hear your voice as clearly when you have your back to them.

- Do not stand directly in front of what you have written on the board.
- Do not clear the board before it is necessary. Writing on the board can be troublesome for students who are visually impaired or find it difficult to take notes due to a disability. If you write something on the board, it is important that this information is also given to the students in electronic form.

#### Projectors

Programs such as PowerPoint provide an easy way to organise important information into slides. However, projectors have their downsides and it is worth keeping the following points in mind:

- It can be difficult to read from slides if they have not been carefully prepared. Look at the slides on the screen before using them in class; stand at the back of the room and see whether you can read them easily.
- Slides can be an excuse for overloading the students with information. Consider the lecture and organise the slides based on the key points. Each slide should contain only a few important points.
- If you simply read out the slides, students will quickly lose focus. They will start reading the slides themselves and stop listening. Leave room for something unexpected – additional explanations, changes and points the students will have to add, fill in or pay attention to.

- Teachers often concentrate too much on the teaching equipment. Face the class so that you can look from the students to the slides and back again without trouble.
- Avoid pointless design features (moving text, noises when you change slides etc.). Put your creativity to better use on more important features, such as an audio or video clip or a good graph.
- When illustrating slides, it is important to keep equality in mind. Make sure to show diversity. Consider, for example, whether you are showing pictures of people from different origins, of different sexes, disabled and non-disabled, different family structures (e.g. homosexual families, single parents) and so forth. It can be particularly effective in subjects that are significantly slanted towards one sex to show the one that is in the minority.
- Use title slides between separate sections of the lecture in order to remind you to take time to speak directly to the students or answer questions.
- Save slides on the course website. Sometimes teachers upload slides to the website before class, but this can be problematic since it may be awkward to make last minute changes if a large number of the students have already printed out the slides in advance.

### Handouts

There are many reasons to use handouts in class.

- It is common to hand out an overview of the day's lecture, or to put it on the course website before class. Generally,

handouts consist of copies of slides or a summary of the lecture. This gives the students the chance to spend time thinking about the material rather than writing down everything that is said. However, it is a good idea to use wide margins and spaces between items so that students can add their own notes.

- If you hand out copies of slides or notes from the lecture, you must ensure that students actively engage with the material. Use the time that students would have used taking notes to raise the level of student participation and try active learning exercises.
- Handouts can provide an effective way to present complicated data, detailed material, examples or diagrams. Emphasise material that you believe students will need to revise, especially if they will need to use it for an assignment. The use of handouts ensures that students have exact records of information that may be difficult to take in and fully understand in the course of one lecture.
- Some teachers hand out notes from the lecture after it is over. This provides an opportunity to add information on points that students asked about. It is a good idea to use the teaching website to provide students with such notes, both to save paper and so that that students can revise the lecture as soon as the teacher has reviewed it.

### Checklist for lectures

#### Preparation

- Aims/learning outcomes for the lecture – what should students know / be able to do after the lecture?



- Draft of the lecture and supporting resources.
- To calm any nerves, you might write the introduction to the lecture and practice it.

### Key points

- The lecture should have no more than five key points.
- Effective visual resources, comparisons, evidence and examples to emphasise the key points.
- Handouts: slides or a summary of the lecture.
- Emphasise aims and key points at the start of the lecture, as you cover them and in your closing summary.

### Connection with the audience

- Get the students' attention at the start with an interesting idea, e.g. a good quotation, anecdote or something else relating to the material.
- Integrate discussions, multimedia, visual formats, active learning strategies, group work and peer instruction.
- Connect new material with the students' existing knowledge, such as general experience or material from previous courses.
- Give the students time to consider the material and a chance to respond to it.
- Students have different needs, which you can meet using oral or visual approaches as well as practical exercises and movement as appropriate.
- Keep the diversity of the group in mind. Be considerate and make different groups visible in your teaching through

the course material, pictures and in discussions.

### Feedback

- 'One minute's writing' or other evaluation techniques. The students answer in one or two sentences the following questions: What were the most important points in the lecture today? What did you not understand?
- Pop quizzes every now and again that test the aims of the lecture, not minute details or cryptic topics that have not been covered in class. Do the students understand the material?
- A teaching evaluation (with the assistance of the Centre for Teaching and Learning) or simply asking for suggestions and comments from the students around the middle of the semester. You might also ask an assistant teacher to evaluate a lecture.

### Discussion as a teaching method

Discussions are cooperative exercises in which students compare their experiences and ideas with new perspectives and understandings, from the course material and also from other students. Good discussions depend on the creativity of all participants. The leader of a discussion necessarily relies on the group: the students' level of preparation and how interested and willing they are to express themselves. At the same time, the leader must plan discussions well; in many ways leading a lively discussion is one of the most demanding of a teacher's tasks.

### What kind of discussion

The most important task at the beginning of the semester, as at the beginning of each discussion



period, is to determine the goals of the discussion.

- Should students be applying skills they have recently learnt, considering new points, learning to critically analyse arguments, practising formulating an argument for an opposing point of view or putting material into the context of their own lives? These goals are not mutually exclusive, but they do require different approaches.
- Let the students know what the key points are and why; also ask them to suggest discussion topics.
- Decide whether the teacher should control proceedings – i.e. asking most of the questions and interrupting to prevent digressions – or allow the interests of the students and their questions to dictate the shape of the discussion.
- It is important to ensure consistency whichever route you choose to take. If the students are responsible for determining the topic of the discussion or reacting to each other's comments, the teacher should not suddenly take over even if the discussion does not go in the direction it was supposed to.
- Ensure that the set material is discussed in discussion periods. Quotations, problems or other examples from the course material ensure that even unprepared students will be able to participate in the discussion.
- Handing out questions from the course material in advance helps students to prepare. Those who require more time to prepare for whatever reason, as well as those who don't usually speak up or

are not confident doing so, can then prepare thoroughly.

### Asking questions

Experienced teachers learn to prepare a stock of questions – easy, demanding or extremely complex – which they can then bring out depending on how the discussion develops.

- Start with material the students are familiar with and don't alienate them from the task at hand. This might be a question that can be answered using general experience or basic knowledge of the subject.
- Once you have warmed the students up, ask them questions that require them to explain how facts are connected and formulate general ideas.
- Bring the discussion to a peak by asking questions that require the students to apply ideas and principles they have learnt to new data and different situations.

How you ask, what you ask and when can impact the value of the questions within the group. Keep the following in mind:

- Sometimes it helps to address an individual if the group is slow to respond, but this may let other students off having to formulate their own answers. It also puts pressure on the student in question and can reduce his or her willingness to answer. However, if questions are directed to the student group as a whole, it can take longer to get an answer from them.
- Teachers should allow a sufficient pause after each question before answering themselves, repeating, rewording or adding further information. This gives the students time to think and shows

that the teacher is more concerned that they learn than with getting a quick answer.

- Avoid immediately accepting the first answer you get or agreeing right away if a student gives the correct answer. This can distract other students and prevent them from considering the answer.
- Avoid questions that you have determined the answer to in advance; they change the discussion time into a guessing game in which students try to give the answers the teacher wants rather than thinking critically about the material.
- Make sure that the students can see each other; have them sit together at one table, if the group is small, or arrange the tables in the room into a circle. Some students are prone to hiding behind others – try to draw them out of their shells. Look at the whole group after asking a question and make eye contact with the students; direct questions to students all over the room.
- Ask another student for comments rather than saying something yourself after an answer has been given. This highlights the fact that the teacher wants to take a minimal role and for the whole group to participate.
- Try to involve all the students and ensure that certain groups do not dominate the discussion. It can be a particularly good idea to make sure that both sexes actively participate in discussions, as well as people of foreign origin and people who perhaps find it harder to express themselves.
- Giving positive reinforcement for answers, whether they are right or

wrong, helps to create a pleasant atmosphere in which students feel comfortable expressing themselves and trying out new ideas. You can reinforce a correct answer with a verbal comment or your facial expression, but it is harder for an incorrect answer. If you asked for information, e.g. "When did the First World War start?" you must simply state that the answer is wrong without belittling the student who answered.

- Ask students to further explain unclear answers rather than immediately correcting them.

### Student participation

Asking carefully prepared questions in an appropriate manner is one of the most important roles of a discussion leader. The other goal is to increase student participation. You can achieve this in various ways:

- Ask the students to suggest discussion topics at the beginning of the discussion period. These might be uncertainties, problems, interesting points or basic ideas from the reading material. Write the suggestions up on the board and allow the students to choose what they want to discuss.
- If you set discussion questions before each class, students can sign themselves up to be responsible for leading the discussion for one or more questions.
- Allow time to have the students brainstorm ideas if the material for the discussion period presents open-ended questions and a variety of ideas could help with understanding. Write all the students' ideas on the board and

assess, compare and reconcile them in the second part of the class whilst you look for the solution.

- To break the ice, you might ask a question that has no right or wrong answer and have everyone answer it. In this way, you can start the discussion with the participation of the whole group and subvert the usual course of events by asking a few of the most reserved students to explain their answers.
- If the discussion group is large, you can divide it up into smaller groups that each tackle the same or different topics from the reading material. Go from group to group, guide them and answer questions if necessary. Allow around twenty minutes at the end of the class to bring the groups together and have them present their conclusions.
- Use further material to stimulate discussions: survey results, historical sources, pictures etc. It is easier to discuss material that the students have in their hands rather than reading material they may have forgotten.
- Start the class by giving the students five to ten minutes to write about points pertinent to the discussion material. This will give them time to collect and organise their thoughts, particularly if the material is complicated. It will also enhance the students' understanding of how writing things down can help them order their thoughts.
- Consider asking one or more students each week to take notes on the major points covered in class. They will then be responsible for getting copies of the

notes to everyone in the next class, or uploading them to the teaching website after the teacher has reviewed them and made any necessary amendments. This method prevents students from feeling that not much happens in discussions.

- Ask either/or questions, e.g.: "What is the bigger factor in the identity of Icelanders, the country's independence or the fact that Iceland is an island?" Divide the group into three smaller groups: those advocating for either position and those who are undecided. The groups who have taken a position discuss the matter between themselves and the undecided are free to add something at any point. If students change their minds during the discussion, they change groups. Debates such as this can promote intellectual flexibility and help students to explain and evaluate positions and the value of arguments. If it is not practical to have students moving between groups, you can use the board to put up opposing points of view and write down points from the students.
- Give the students the chance to develop their ideas. Rephrase questions and 'almost right answers' and direct them back to the students. Try to draw knowledge out of the students which they possess, maybe without being aware of it. However, if a satisfactory answer cannot be obtained from the students, it is best for the teacher to simply answer the question.
- Presenting information visually helps students to follow the discussion and think in an organised manner.

After a few questions to kick-start the discussion, the students can begin discussing topics amongst themselves and the teacher can go from group to group and summarise conclusions. Some groups will be able to continue the conversation without much difficulty; others will need more help.

### A good atmosphere

There are various ways to create an atmosphere that encourages the students to participate.

- Learn the students' names and make sure they know each others' names.
- Arrange the furniture in the room such that students can make as much eye contact with each other as possible, e.g. by arranging the chairs into a circle.
- Make sure that the classroom is accessible to all regardless of mobility; it can be difficult for people with reduced mobility to always have trouble getting into the room and to the chairs and tables.
- Turn up shortly before class starts and stay around for a while after it ends in order to chat informally with students and answer questions.
- Try to help students find the answer for themselves when they ask questions.
- If a conflict of values arise, it is worth helping the students to explain their own values to others and to respect the views of others if no solution can be found. Disagreements could even become the basis for an interesting essay topic.

When teachers show the students respect through their behaviour and choice of words and encourage the group to study as a team, a

good atmosphere is created in which students are willing to share their ideas with each other.

### Checklist for effective discussion leading

#### Preparation

- Consider the aims of the discussion. What are they? What material is to be discussed? At what point would it be good to change discussion topic? Do the students know enough about the material to be able to discuss it?
- Use discussions to help students connect concepts and ideas in the course material with their own lives, to encourage students to critically evaluate material and to tackle problems which are open-ended, have no clear solution and/or can be successfully tackled using a number of different approaches.
- Be prepared for the students to have diverse backgrounds and belong to different groups. If, for example, a student discusses a partner of the same sex, the teacher must be prepared to discuss this with respect just as anything else and, if necessary, to tackle any prejudiced discourse and indirect discrimination from other students.
- Give the students a chance to 'warm up' with a short (one to five minutes) written exercise in class on the discussion material, a short three to five-person discussion or homework before the discussion period relating to the material that will be discussed.

#### Making things easier

- Set clear standards for participation, discuss them with the students and maintain them.

- Emphasis an atmosphere in which safety and respect are paramount.
- Use open-ended questions and ask students to explain and come up with examples and definitions.
- Ask the students to address each other rather than the teacher.
- Allow regular pauses in order to give the students time to consider what the teacher has said and comments from other students.
- Inspire and encourage the students as far as you can. Tackle conflict head on. Listen to the students and learn from them. If prejudice and discrimination rear their heads, you must make it clear that such attitudes will not be tolerated. Silence is the best friend of prejudice and failing to speak up against prejudice may be interpreted as agreement on the part of the teacher.
- Keep talkative students in check and try to draw silent students out of their shells.
- If you write ideas up on the board or slide, you must ensure that you take everyone's ideas into consideration. Otherwise, there is a risk that some students will lose confidence and stop contributing.
- Review the main points, how the discussion went and conclusions at the end of class.

### Evaluate the discussion

- How many students took part in the discussion?
- Who took part and who didn't? Are there certain groups that dominate and others who do not?

- How was the tone of the discussion – was it stimulating and respectful?
- Ask for the students' reactions to discussion periods.
- It is possible to get a student representative to monitor discussions and provide feedback for the teacher and even the students. Such feedback provides students with a good insight into the discussion and can improve their understanding of its importance.





## Teaching in a laboratory

The laboratory is a place where abstract ideas become tangible, theories are tested and applied and students acquire a deeper understanding of the course material. For experiments to be successful, all components must be well planned. The research process does not always go smoothly and students sometimes require guidance when interpreting their data.

### Course planning

When organising a course in a laboratory, you must make several important decisions:

- What tasks/experiments will be set?
- How would it be best to integrate academic teaching and experiments?
- How can you organise and find a balance between collaboration and independent work in the laboratory?
- What equipment will be required?

Firstly, you must consider the content and those research skills the students are expected to acquire. The course's learning outcomes will indicate which material should be addressed and the aims of the experiments will determine how the students will tackle the material and what knowledge and skills they acquire on the course.

### Setting assignments

The setting of assignments is based on the defined aims for the practical part of the course. Generally, appropriate aims include helping students understand theories by considering and verifying ideas, going through research and design processes, strengthening their ability to produce reasoned arguments, and teaching them to use necessary equipment. Some learning outcomes require training that

students can receive only through direct and active participation.

### Integrating theories

Once the syllabus has been organised, it is vital to integrate the teaching of concepts and ideas with their use in the laboratory. Theories ought to be closely connected to appropriate exercises – any delays or new material in between can weaken the intended impact of the practical work. What is the best way to bridge the gap between lectures and practical teaching? Are there sides to the practical teaching that belong in the lecture hall and vice versa? Compile all the relevant lectures, reading material and further reading and provide the students with access to this material.

### Group work

Many projects within laboratories are conducive to group study, which can take place inside the laboratory or outside class time, in discussions after an experiment or in small study groups. Students can be divided into 2 to 4-person research or study groups early on in the course. The number of students in each group is determined by the number of students on the course and the available equipment. Because different experiments require different equipment, you may sometimes need to combine a few of these small groups or reorganise things in another way, but you must keep in mind that groups larger than four are not ideal if everyone is to actively participate. As well as giving students a chance to learn from each other, group work prepares them for professional work, since most scientific or technical projects are completed by teams. It is particularly helpful to ask students to divide up complicated projects and coordinate individual tasks. Students can thereby take responsibility for part of the project whilst keeping the big

picture in mind. It is important to keep an eye on whether certain students or groups are marginalised, frequently assigned certain roles or frequently volunteer for the same roles. Lack of trust based on sex, origin or disability may play a part here. If you notice such things happening, you should intervene and correct prejudice head on.

### Appropriate equipment

You must ensure that the most suitable equipment for each experiment is available and in working order. You must also provide the students with clear instructions on its use. Equipment should not be so complicated or limited that it undermines the purpose of the work. High-tech, expensive equipment can distract students from the theories the experiment is supposed to be proving. On the other hand, outdated and substandard technology can lead students to guess results rather than conducting experiments themselves.

### Planning and reviewing experiments

It is possible to prevent problems by planning experiments well in advance and conducting each one yourself (or asking an assistant teacher to do so) before setting the students the task. Such tests will ensure that the students are not held up by ambiguous instructions.

Schedules for practical classes should allow time for the teacher to review the data for each experiment with the students. This is a necessary step in helping students learn to review their own data and understand results in connection with the theories taught on the course. Discussions also enable teachers to identify any problems that may arise in the process of conducting the experiment. It will

then be possible to fix these problems before the next class.

### Other teaching methods

This section has addressed common teaching methods: lectures, discussions and practical teaching in laboratories. Various other unconventional but effective methods may be used in one class or for a whole course. For example, this section has not addressed group work as a teaching method in any great detail.

Any deviation from the traditional lecture format will surprise the students and pique their interest. A selection of handbooks can be found at the Centre for Teaching and Learning addressing diverse teaching methods, amongst other things. There are also various websites discussing different teaching methods, their pros and cons, e.g. <http://www.adprima.com/teachmeth.htm>.

### Office hours

Extremely valuable teaching often takes place inside a teacher's office. Office hours are useful for very enthusiastic students as well as those struggling with the course material, for the shy and for the talkative. Communication and sincere discussions, even with just a few students, can provide significant insight into how the course is going. In office hours, as with all other communication with students, you must consider equality.

It is important to observe which students come to office hours, whether it is one sex rather than the other, whether there are certain groups who perhaps don't come, and then ask yourself how you can change that. Do you treat everyone the same? Do you call female students 'dear' or 'love', do you expect male students to be tougher? Do you assume that disabled students are helpless? Do you stop discussions about relationships as soon as



homosexuality is mentioned? Do you assume that students with origins other than Icelandic will perform worse and understand less?

Generally teaching staff are expected to have weekly office hours for the duration of a course. If possible, it can be a good idea to have more frequent office hours and at different times or offer students the chance to book a time outside set office hours. It is extremely important that the teacher is always available at the specified time and arrives punctually to scheduled meetings with students.

Your office hours may pass without any students coming, though. How can you encourage students to take advantage of the opportunity to talk informally to their teacher? If teachers are friendly in class and give students a chance to chat after lectures, it is more likely that students will come to meet them in their office. At the start of the course you can inform the students of your office hours, invite them to make use of them and remind them several times throughout the semester, suggest things that they might like to discuss, e.g. assignments, postgraduate studies, research opportunities or careers in the subject.

Some teachers go further and actually require the students to come to them during office hours at least once during the semester. Although it can be time-consuming and only practical if the student group is relatively small, those teaching staff who take such measures are happy with the outcome. They say that it gives them a better understanding of the student group and that they get to know the silent and shy students much sooner. They also find that students are more likely to come again or ask questions after having had a discussion with the teacher in this way.

You can expect more contact when the students are working on assignments, revising

for examinations or writing essays. Assistant teachers ought to be willing to adjust their office hours to the varying needs of students. It can be difficult for assistant teachers to set a limit to office hours in a demanding course; a group of anxious students can take up an excessive amount of a teacher's time. In such a case, you might have the students book appointments and limit each appointment to fifteen minutes. It is also a good idea to stay around for a while in the classroom after class to schedule meetings with students and answer any simple questions they may have. You can invite more than one student to come to your office hours at the same time and thereby initiate a discussion about topics or problems that many students often have in common.

### Electronic communication

Teachers who use electronic communication as part of their teaching can expect more active participation from their students. Students will also be more likely to provide feedback on the teaching. The most common ways to communicate with students outside of the classroom is by email and on forums on the teaching website. It is important to observe which students express themselves electronically. If there is a noticeable gender gap, teachers must ask themselves whether their attitude or teaching methods need to be revised in order to level the ratio. It is a good idea to rethink how you speak to each sex and even specifically discuss the matter after class with the students of the sex that communicates less. It is a good idea to strengthen your relationship with them and offer assistance.

Electronic tools make students feel they have better access to the course's teachers. The use of mailing lists, threads and forums have also paved the way for longer and less

constrained discussions amongst students who have more time outside the classroom to consider their answers. Even students who are shy in class can come to life online. One feature of teaching systems such as Moodle is that students can upload pictures of themselves to use as avatars; this option turns the forum into a kind of virtual classroom and minimises the anonymity that students often experience when participating in courses with a lot of other students. Discussion threads and forums are part of the course website on Uglá and it is easy to send students a post using the notification system. To make still better use of the online teaching environment, Moodle is a good option. You can apply for a Moodle site for the course from the Centre for Teaching and Learning or directly through the course website in Uglá (via All operations > Create Moodle course).

The other side of electronic communication is the burden that it can place on the teacher. Students expect to receive answers promptly and fewer restrictions on communication can lead to the teacher being inundated with last minute emails before examinations and assignment deadlines. You must set clear guidelines at the start of the course concerning the role of electronic communication on the course, not only what you expect of the students regarding online participation but also what they can expect of you regarding response time and discussion moderation. People can also be more unkind when communicating online. It is a good idea to set clear rules about online communication (as for communication on the course as a whole), regarding respect and kindness and the fact that hate speech and prejudice will not be tolerated. Such statements can be obtained from the Centre for Teaching and Learning or the UI equal opportunities officer. Giving students advance notice of

expected standards makes it easier to tackle any issues that may arise, but of course such statements are first and foremost preventative measures.

Teachers planning to set up a Facebook page for the course should remember that this distributes power such that all students are equal on the page and the teacher can set certain rules. Things often go badly when students set up Facebook pages for a course themselves. In such a situation, the founder of the page and his or her friends are in a more powerful position than others and not all students may even be invited to join.

## Technology in teaching

Computers have had a huge impact on the ways in which many teaching staff pursue their academic careers. Searching in databases, using statistical programs for analysing data, searching for sources online and email communication with colleagues in the same university or in other countries – all these things have become indispensable in the work of an academic. Technology has also entered the classroom and teachers have been using it more and more to improve their teaching and add variety. Teachers are no longer simply trying out different ways to use technology but rather focusing on how it can enable teachers and students to achieve learning goals in an effective and efficient manner.

## Pedagogical objectives

What technology will you use in your teaching and how will it fit into the structure of the course? In most decisions regarding teaching, you should begin by considering the course's learning outcomes. If these goals will be easily attained using equipment that is already available, it could be unnecessary to spend time

and energy on technological development. It may also just be simpler to achieve your pedagogical objectives using conventional teaching methods. Even if students are used to using computers, this does not necessarily mean that they want to be tied to computers inside the classroom. It could moreover well be that students with strong technical proficiency become more engaged when they get the chance to work with their hands, participate in lively discussions, group work or field trips.

In reality a lot of teaching software is intended for use outside of the classroom. For example, forums and teaching websites containing interactive examples, exercises and background information can augment the teaching that takes place in the lecture hall. Further material on websites, DVDs and so forth make it easier for students to seek information and build up the knowledge that best suits their interests, skills and competences. Course teaching websites and discussion threads can encourage relationships between students that go beyond the classroom and even beyond the end of the course.

Technology in the classroom can also serve an important purpose. Teachers can effectively get information across using multimedia or a teaching website. Such methods can also enable students to see and hear things which otherwise would have been described to them in a lecture or textbook. Multimedia makes it possible to show things which would not have been otherwise possible to demonstrate effectively in a lecture hall or classroom, whether they be experiments, natural disasters or journeys to distant lands. Creative use of technology in the classroom can advance other pedagogical aims, such as increased participation and student understanding. Using class time to teach the students how to use new

technology can also be worthwhile, particularly in introductory courses that necessitate the use of special computer programs (e.g. statistical programs in the social sciences or design programs in engineering).

### Assistance

When introducing new technology into a course, typically things do not go quite according to plan at first. Janitors oversee technical equipment inside classrooms. Information on the name and telephone number of the janitor for each building can be found on the University website, [www.english.hi.is](http://www.english.hi.is) (under For Students > Facilities > University Buildings). UI Computing Services oversee the University's computer system and have a service desk in the University Centre and in the Centre for Technological Innovation, telephone number: 525-4222, email address: [help@hi.is](mailto:help@hi.is). Technical information can also be found on their website, [www.rhi.hi.is](http://www.rhi.hi.is). Centre for Teaching and Learning personnel can assist with technical aspects of teaching or direct you to the people who can help. The Centre for Teaching and Learning also maintains an information website, [www.kemst.hi.is](http://www.kemst.hi.is), which includes information on teaching supported by technology.

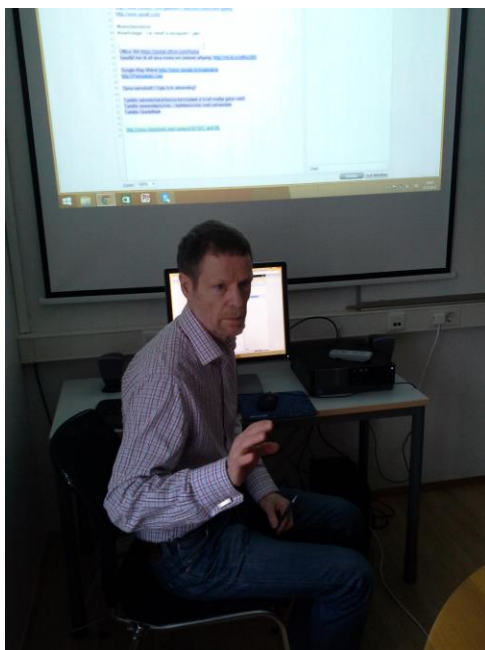
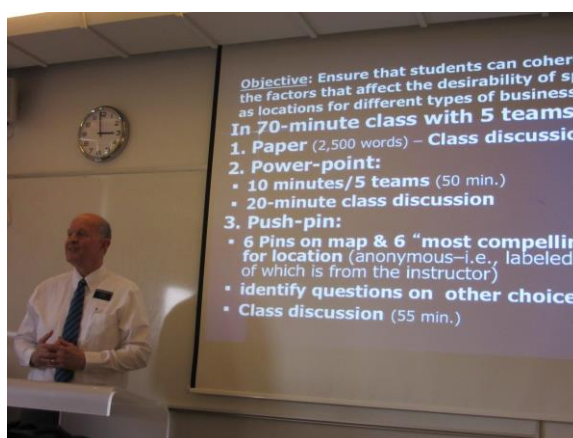
### A few words of warning

It would not be an honest discussion of technology in teaching without mentioning a few of the downsides:

- Good teaching is much more than the simple transfer of knowledge or specialist skills. The primary challenge in teaching is getting the students interested in the subject and encouraging them to apply themselves.

You will not necessarily achieve these goals through using more technology.

- There are various different tasks involved. Technology can certainly be used to increase the quality of teaching. It can also be used to lower the costs of teaching by making student groups larger. Teachers must understand the basis for their decision to use technology and recognise when there is a conflict between quality goals and economisation.
- Realistically evaluate the longevity and cost-effectiveness of the teaching technology in question. Developing good teaching technology is not easy and it doesn't happen by itself. The cost of maintenance and redesign, especially for technology that requires specialised software, is also high.



## 4. Assessment

Grading can be quite a challenge for teaching staff. New teachers tend to be overly strict to start off with to prove that they aren't pushovers, or too lenient due to a fear of discouraging students or making them lose interest in their studies. Even those who have reached a balance in this matter can find course assessment to be the most difficult part of the job. Grades can worry students and interfere with their interest in the course material. The importance of grades for the students means that teachers must make a consistent effort to be fair and reasonable, no matter what their views on course assessment in general. You must set clear criteria for grading and follow these criteria fairly in order to prevent worry and conflict.

Examinations are the most common way to evaluate student performance. When designing examinations or assignments, it is important to keep in mind the learning outcomes being assessed; a well composed and clear multiple choice examination may suffice if the primary learning outcome for the course is simply that the students learn facts, definitions and terminology. If you emphasise performance in class and ungraded assignments, but then set a multiple choice examination with factual questions, this will cause discontent amongst the students and is not a fair assessment of their learning. If course assessment is performance based (essays, presentations, assignments or class participation), students must have received clear instructions regarding assessment criteria and, if possible, an example of an outstanding assignment by a former student. If the course assessment is also intended to measure students' effort, it is

important to tell the students at the beginning of the course what steps they need to take in order to demonstrate genuine effort in their studies (e.g. attending the teacher's office hours, reviewing their assignments with the teacher, revising essays, attending lectures and discussion periods and contributing in class).

### Fair and uncontroversial course assessment

#### How should you assess students?

Course assessment methods should be determined when the course is at the planning stage. Teachers and assistant teachers shall determine the assessment methods to be used, how students' work will be assessed and the weighting of individual assignments in the final grade.

It is important to consider the results of previous examinations that have been used on the course and see whether there is a noticeable gender gap. Research has shown that men do better on multiple choice questions whilst women often do better on essay questions (Ferber, Birnbaum and Green, 1983; Lumsden and Scott, 1987; Siegfried, 1979).

To ensure equality, it is therefore a good idea to use some kind of mix of both. Research has also shown that performance assessment is often affected by gender stereotypes, e.g. women are described as compassionate, sensitive and enthusiastic whilst comparable men are described as quick learners (Axelson, Solow, Ferguson and Cohen, 2010). Other research shows that teaching staff at Yale University rated students as more competent if they thought they were men (Moss-Racusina, Dovidio, Brescoll, Grahama and Handelsmana, 2012). Teachers must keep an



eye out for such bias, both in themselves and in their students, e.g. in peer review.

There must also be a clear protocol to follow if students do not hand in assignments or fail to reach the minimum acceptable standard. Students who always hand in assignments on time will perhaps feel resentful if teachers frequently grant other students extensions. It must therefore be clear from the outset whether there will be a late penalty for assignments submitted after the deadline and if so how large.

If there are a lot of assignments to turn in, you might, for example, give all the students two days' worth of extension at the beginning of the course which they can use for any assignment that semester. They could then, if needed, submit one assignment two days late or two assignments one day late. In this way, the students are given a certain flexibility from the outset, but it is also made clear that no further exemptions will be made.

### **Explain course assessment to the students**

When you have considered all these points, the next step is to inform the students what is expected of them and how their progress towards reaching the course objectives will be assessed. Assessment methods and working procedures for grading will help in reaching these objectives and assessing student performance fairly. Good organisation and good explanations prevent misunderstandings – and potentially angry students – later on.

### **Records**

Keep a good record of the performance and course assessment for each student throughout the semester. Such a record will make it easier to justify and/or re-evaluate the final grade if necessary. Record everything that affects the grade: participation in class, field trip

attendance and grades for pop quizzes and assignments. Final examinations sat at the University of Iceland shall be filed for one year.

### **Grade distribution**

It is a good idea to create a graph of the grade distribution for each examination or assignment. Such a graph presents a clear picture of how students are doing individually and in comparison with other students on the course. Statistics are informative for students who are concerned about their performance and an overview of grade distribution will highlight the effectiveness of the assessment method.

### **Comments on course assessment**

Occasionally students will challenge their examination grades or the final results of course assessment. In such circumstances, it is vital to listen to the student's comments. The teacher may have made a calculation error, overlooked an assignment or been unable to read a student's writing on an examination paper. If, however, the grade was correct, you must explain how it conforms with information on course assessment given at the beginning of the course. The clearer that information was, the easier it will be to review and justify the grading.

### **External examiners and students' rights**

Students have the right to receive from teaching staff an explanation of the evaluation of their written examination papers, if requested within 15 days of grades being published. Students unwilling to accept a teacher's assessment can contact the head of faculty and an external examiner will then be appointed to review the examination. A majority of the students in a particular course may also, by submitting a reasoned argument,



request that an external examiner be appointed to assess written examination papers for the final examination for the course. Teaching staff, should they believe there is particular reason to do so, may also request the appointment of an external examiner for an individual examination, in which case the examiner shall review the papers of all students in the course.

## Examinations

Examinations can not only tell you how much the students have learnt – they also provide opportunities for further learning, through revision or by making students use or think in a new way about what they have learnt. Examinations should cover all aspects of the course and be based on its key objectives. When you take on a course it is a good idea to review older examinations carefully to see which points the questions focused on and how they were worded.

Students should be informed at the beginning of the semester of the kind of examination that will be set. If students have reason to believe that the teacher will emphasise facts from the course material, they will place a lower value on getting to grips with overall ideas and the context of the material. If, however, examinations demand a deeper understanding and knowledge of the ideas that have been covered, students are more likely to base their learning on that. Frequent examinations promote improved learning as well as providing you with information on the students' progress. If you choose to go down this road, it is important to get results back to students quickly and review the examinations with them in order to get the maximum benefit of frequent examinations and feedback.

## Examination formats

The examination format used should be based on the learning outcomes that form the basis of each course. Here follow examples of a few examination formats which can be combined to create fair course assessment methods, as well as a few guidelines for the use of each format. You must bear in mind that different groups perform differently in different examination components, e.g. multiple choice sections and essay questions. Research has shown that men do better on multiple choice questions whilst women do better on essay questions (Ferber, Birnbaum and Green, 1983; Lumsden and Scott, 1987; Siegfried, 1979).

- Examinations with essay questions give students the chance to organise, evaluate and think – they often have the most educational value. It can, however, be harder to grade them. Grading criteria should be discussed with students and assistant teachers before the examination is set.
- Examinations in mathematics and other scientific subjects are generally based on solving problems. Numerical or logical problems examine first and foremost students' ability to apply what they have learnt; introducing new kinds of problems (which require students to apply methods they have learnt to new problems) can make the examination more demanding.
- It is very time-consuming to compose a multiple choice examination, but they can be used to gauge both students' knowledge and their use of terminology. If you plan to use such an examination, it is helpful to compose questions regularly over the semester whilst lectures and reading material are fresh in your mind. Special answer

sheets for multiple choice examinations can be obtained from the Division of Academic Affairs. Student Registration scans in completed answer sheets and calculates the results for teachers. Multiple choice examinations are a simple solution for teachers on large courses or those teaching diverse material which is difficult to cover in just a few questions.

- Examinations in which students fill out blank boxes can test their memories with regards to key terminology and facts. If you use complicated questions, you can expect to receive more answers than you assumed when composing the examination.
- Examinations where students pair together questions and answers can be used to test the students' knowledge of the relationships between words, concepts and definitions. You must make sure to offer enough possible answers such that students cannot simply guess through ruling other answers out.
- Questions that demand short answers help to test students' ability to remember information and its reasoning. Such examinations achieve similar goals to multiple choice questions but require the students to remember, not just know, the right answer.
- A good way to help students get to grips with the course material is to set them the task of writing examination questions. The teacher may then choose to use the questions the students come up with in the real examination in some way.

- In recent years the popularity of take-home examinations has risen. These involve the students solving problems or answering examination questions outside of the classroom and then sending their work to the teacher.

Although they may seem to be an ideal examination format, they do have their downsides. You can minimise these downsides with a few cautionary measures. For example, you might set a word limit for each answer/essay so that students who have other examinations are not disadvantaged compared to those who can devote themselves entirely to the take-home examination. The submission deadline for the examination must be clear, as well as the submission process (through an electronic submission system, by email, on paper in the teacher's pigeonhole or in class). There should also be clear guidelines on whether students may confer with each other and whether they should stick to the course material or are free to use other sources.

It is also possible to set online examinations in the learning management system Moodle or with Question Writer, a program available to teaching staff at the University of Iceland. This system offers the option of various question formats and many possible ways to answer them.

### Good examinations

Good examinations are written using clear, coherent language such that all students can understand the questions. Good examinations seek only to test those skills and knowledge that have been emphasised in the course in question. Good examinations are of a

reasonable length considering the amount of time students will be given to complete them. Clear instructions are given on the examination paper itself (and should furthermore be explained before the examination begins). The number of marks available for each section of the examination should be indicated so that students can organise their time effectively.

For examinations based on solving problems, you should set questions similar to the problems the students have been solving during the semester. The difficulty of the problems should gradually increase. The first problem should be a confidence booster so that nervous students don't despair right at the start of the examination. You must avoid having the solution to one problem dependent on the student having found the correct solution to another problem in the examination. Finally, you should avoid long and elaborate calculations and emphasise ideas rather than stamina.

When you have written a rough draft of the examination, you should categorise questions according to the competences they demand: remembering information, significance, interpretations, applying key principles, analysing concepts, connecting ideas or assessing value. Make sure that the questions address the competences to be assessed. This applies in particular to multiple choice examinations in which a small variation on a question can demand more complex thinking and fit in better with the course's learning outcomes. You must make sure that course material from the entire semester is covered in the examination; it is easy to forget yourself and overly emphasise points from the beginning and end of the semester at the cost of material covered in between.

The structure of the examination should be simple and neat. Make sure not to cram too much on each page. After composing the examination, it is a good idea to ask an experienced teacher or assistant teacher to read it over. Poorly written questions and errors discourage students, who expect the teacher to take care over the examination.

Teachers should always take examinations themselves before setting them. In most cases, teachers should be able to complete an examination in a quarter of the time that the students will be given.

### Grading

#### **Multiple choice examinations, examinations with short answers**

It takes longer to create multiple choice examinations than other examinations, but at the same time they are the quickest to grade. Multiple choice examinations can be marked very quickly when Student Registration personnel scan in the answer sheets and a special program reads the answers. It is worth mentioning that although results are calculated for teachers, they themselves are responsible for the grading and should always take a few samples to verify the calculations.

When teachers receive results from multiple choice examinations, they also receive an answer ratio for each question. If students do particularly badly answering a particular question, e.g. if 80-100% of students answer incorrectly, it is likely that the question was flawed or poorly worded. In such case, it would be fair to either give everyone the point or discount the question.

Grades from multiple choice examinations set using Moodle or Question Writer are available to the teacher immediately after the end of the examination.

When marking other examinations it can be a good idea to divide questions between teachers, if more than one person teaches the course. This makes it more likely that grading will be consistent and that someone will spot a pattern of deviation in certain questions. Whatever the format of the examination, teachers must always expect to receive different answers to the ones they had imagined – these may also be correct.

### Essay examinations

It can be quite a challenge for teachers to get through a stack of essays and remain consistent in grading. When more than one teacher teaches on a course it becomes easier, because then the workload can be shared. Make sure to carefully follow assessment criteria approved by all teaching staff involved in marking the examination. If each teacher has handled a specialised topic on the course, it is probably better to divide the examination questions such that teachers mark what they themselves have taught. Dividing questions up in this way can better ensure consistent grading, even if some teachers are stricter than others. To minimise inconsistency in grading, teachers may agree to show each other the answers they give the highest grade to and compare them.

Awarding a grade for an essay examination is largely based on subjective assessment and judgement can be clouded by tiredness, boredom or a desire to get the job over and done with. Teachers are likely to be strictest for the first papers and become less demanding as they work through the stack. To counteract this effect, it is a good idea to read a few answers before you start grading in order to get a sense of the quality of the answers. If you find yourself becoming tired or bored, you should take a break from marking.

### After the examination

Once grades have been awarded for all examination papers, it is a good idea for the teaching staff who have marked the examination to compare notes, resolve any problems that may have come up, and discuss the results and what they might say about the course and the examination itself. At this stage it is important to think about gender and check whether there is a gender gap in the students' answers or results. If this is the case, you must ask yourself why and potentially adjust the examination, change the weighting of certain components or plan it differently next time the course is taught.

In order for students to get the most out of the examination – and out of consideration to them – grades should be returned as quickly as possible. Grades for final examinations shall be recorded two weeks after each examination at the latest, but three weeks at the latest after each examination in the December examination period.

If grades for an individual examination have not been given out two weeks after the examination date (three weeks after the December examination period), students can contact Student Registration and submit a written request for information on whether they have passed the examination. Student Registration shall provide an answer to such requests within a week at the latest. Students can check their grades on their home page in Ugla or at Student Registration. You can reveal the grade distribution so that students know how well they performed in relation to others, but you may not reveal the grades of individual students since they have the right to confidentiality in this matter. Final examination papers are never returned to students, but they

have the right to an explanation of their grade for 15 days after it is returned.

### Checklist for examinations

- **Are the students ready for the examination?**

Give the students a chance to have a look at older examinations, if possible (e.g. by showing examinations in class or adding them to an examination archive for the course), and explain to them which material is particularly important. Make sure that students are familiar with the format of the questions/problems that will be set in the examination.

- **Does the examination reflect the course objectives?**

Compare the examination material with the key points in the curriculum, syllabus and reading material and ensure consistency.

- **Is the examination a suitable length?**

Take the examination. Teachers should generally be able to complete an examination in a quarter of the time that the students will need. Keep time-consuming calculations to a minimum.

- **Are the instructions clear and well-ordered and is the format of the examination clear?**

Ask an assistant teacher or another teacher from the faculty to read over your instructions with a view to spotting ambiguous or misleading wording.

- **Is it clear how many marks are available for each question?**

Ensure that the weighting of each question is clear so that students can decide how much time to spend on each section of the examination.

- **Does the examination start with questions or problems that boost, rather than knock, students' confidence?**

Be understanding of exam nerves and start the examination with questions that will be relatively easy for students who have prepared properly.

- **Are the questions/problems interesting?**

Try to use interesting applications or presentations of the material that show the value of the course material in which the students are being examined. Make demands of the students without confusing them.

### Essays, projects and presentations

Essays, projects and presentations are excellent opportunities for students to demonstrate their academic progress and interest in the course. Students generally welcome such assignments if they receive clear instructions and are given some freedom in choosing the subject and content.

### Interesting and effective assignments

Since essays, projects and presentations require students to spend considerable time preparing a final version, you can emphasise the most ambitious learning outcomes of the course in such assignments. Assignments may, for example, involve analysing and summarising opposing perspectives, applying academic theories to realistic problems, or creative additions to the course material. When selecting a topic or format for this kind of assignment, remember that it must encourage students to reach these objectives. Different approaches can make a simple task more interesting:

- Have the students tailor the essay, project or presentation to a certain audience, rather than the teacher. The audience might be, e.g., an editorial board or a fund's evaluation board (for a research essay), a judge or jury (for logical arguments or analyses), the general public (for informative material or news commentaries) or a historical figure. The format of the assignment can be tailored to the audience, e.g. a proposal sent to a journal's editorial board or a letter to a historical figure. This also trains the students in writing or talking to different audiences.
- Have the students find new sources beyond the conventional library resources, if it is practicable for the assignment in question. For example, students could conduct interviews or observe at a relevant site or event.
- Ask an expert to discuss the students' work at the end of the semester. You could invite a colleague from the University community or the relevant profession to watch presentations on the students' assignments and choose the most ingenious assignment, or to discuss the process the students used in a professional context.
- Allow some kind of collaboration or peer feedback amongst the students. Students could, for example, review each other's drafts or you might assign them different sides of the same topic and allow time to discuss them.

When writing instructions for an assignment, keep in mind that new students appreciate a clear bibliography and more detailed instructions whilst students who are further

along in their studies prefer a greater freedom of choice regarding the topic. If you decide to allow the students to choose from among various subjects, you must ensure that the instructions are thorough enough to make sure that students can complete the work to a high standard. You might, for example, allow students to choose their topic but provide detailed instructions on how to compose a good literary analysis, grant application or informative website (whatever the format of the assignment is). Alternatively, you might allow the students to choose the format of their assignment but set exact requirements for the number and quality of sources to be used. For all students and all assignments, it is helpful to:

- Explain the grading criteria.
- Give students the chance to look at assignments completed by former students.
- Divide the assignment into a few stages (e.g. draft, revision, final version) in order to prevent procrastination or misunderstanding.

### Assessing essays

Students are generally not best pleased when essays are handed back with a grade but hardly any comments. When going back over essays, students learn most from intelligent comments written in the margins, on the back or on a separate sheet of paper. Suggestions for amendments should be clear and precise so that students have a good chance of improving. If you find yourself making similar comments about many students' work, you might prepare a list of points that the students are struggling with – e.g. how to write a criticism, build a reasoned argument or cite sources correctly. It would be even better to have such a list ready



when you set the assignment so that students are prepared.

Essays should be assessed according to their content, structure and style. It is useful for students if each component of the essay is assessed individually. However, students must realise that the overall strength of the content of the essay (ideas, analysis or insight) cannot actually be separated from the execution (organisation, structure and style). Language is, despite everything, the medium students must use to organise and communicate their thoughts. Some teachers have had good experiences asking students to write an essay twice. When going over the first version, emphasis is placed on constructive criticism of the content, structure and style. The second version submitted by the students is then graded and usually shows progress that satisfies the demands of both students and teachers.

Many people believe that number grades prevent students from getting much use out of comments and criticism from the teacher. To counteract this, you can hand students' assignments back with comments but without grades and give them time to read the comments and think about what grade the assignment deserves.

Use the same methods when marking essays as you would for an essay-based examination. Read a few essays before you start grading to get an idea of the range of quality in the answers.

### Assessing projects and presentations

Make sure that students have received explicit criteria for the project and perhaps even prepare a checklist or a 'scoreboard' based on these criteria. Such lists might include anything from the length of the project to use of sources or originality. It is up to the teacher to decide whether to hand out such a checklist to the

students, but they always deserve and also appreciate comments explaining their grades.

### Assessing group projects

Group projects help students achieve learning outcomes (such as improving their collaborative skills) that conventional coursework does not involve. However, it can be extremely difficult to assess them fairly. Work is often divided unequally between members of the group. For this reason, teachers sometimes ask students to give each group member a grade for contribution, including themselves. It is important here to consider gender. Ideas about the competence of individuals can be gendered, e.g. women can be described as conscientious team players and men as motivated quick learners, although similar individuals are being described.

There is then a danger that certain adjectives will carry more weight than others, e.g. motivated might be considered better than conscientious. Stay conscious of this and also alert your students – offer them your 'gender glasses'. It can be a good idea to discuss this in class in advance so that everyone is aware of it, or include it in the description of peer review in the syllabus.

Projects which lend themselves to collaboration are often those in which the outcome is a 'product', such as films, computer software or material inventions, or the results of many different projects presented in class or in writing.

### Academic integrity and dishonesty

Teaching staff at the University of Iceland are required to maintain their own and their students' academic integrity.

The University of Iceland Code of Ethics discusses the responsibilities of students and staff towards the University of Iceland, other

members of the University community, the field and society. The Code of Ethics has the following to say about student responsibilities: "Students shall be courteous and considerate towards teaching staff, comply with reasonable instructions and communicate honestly with them. They shall avoid all misconduct and take into account the University guidelines for good practice in teaching and examinations." (Article 2.2.10)

UI Code of Ethics, as well as other University regulations which may be found on the University website under About > Rules and Legislation. This page also includes the rules of procedure *On good working practice in teaching and examination at the University of Iceland*, which addresses, amongst other things, disciplinary sanctions for misconduct and the complaints and appeals process. Students who are found guilty of misconduct in an examination or assignment may lose the right to sit further examinations, be formally reprimanded or expelled from the University, on a temporary or permanent basis.

You should allow time at the beginning of a course to discuss the Code of Ethics and academic integrity in a wider context, as well as explaining what is expected of the students and answering their questions.

As well as informing students of the University rules and disciplinary sanctions, teachers should promote a learning environment that minimises any possible temptation to transgress. Students must understand the teacher's assessment criteria, what kind of examinations will be set and what assignments they will be responsible for. If the students are writing essays, it is worth monitoring their work, e.g. by having them hand in drafts and bibliographies. This lowers the likelihood of students submitting other

people's intellectual property. You should also discuss plagiarism specifically, particularly in introductory or methodology courses and essay courses, in which students are not generally familiar with all forms of plagiarism.

## Reference letters

When writing references for students, you are not only evaluating their performance in class or prospective career, but also helping them to attain their personal and professional goals.

A few points to keep in mind when writing references:

- Meet with students and ask them to bring their CV, an overview of their grades and examples of assignments from courses on which they did particularly well. CVs and grade overviews provide information on students' backgrounds as well as insight into their interests and activities outside class.
- Ask students to explain their plans in more detail (e.g. "Why do you want to pursue postgraduate studies?" or "How does a position in journalism fit into your long-term goals?").
- Get the full name and address of the party for whom to reference is intended, as well as the date by which it must be completed.
- Write the reference as soon as possible following the meeting with the student, whilst all the information is still fresh in your mind. Consider equality as you write. Ask yourself questions such as: Would I use the same phrasing if the student was the opposite sex, had a different country of origin or was non-disabled? Make sure you don't view

students based on variables and groups to which they belong, but rather based on their abilities and character. To correct possible biases, you must often think about what groups the students belong to (sex, sexual orientation, age, origin, disability, etc.).

- Use faculty, school or University stationery. A reference letter is generally one typed page containing the following information:
  - The relationship between the referee and the applicant and length of this relationship.
  - Precise information on the applicant's abilities, work completed for the referee, strengths, weaknesses and unusual qualities which could enhance or hinder the applicant's performance. Be clear and objective and avoid exaggeration or overstatements, since such behaviour can lower your credibility.
  - Comments on how the above information is connected to the student's choice of postgraduate studies or job application. Emphasise the applicant's strong points and the reasons he or she is suitable for the position or for postgraduate studies.
  - Your professional title and telephone number or email address / home address at which you can be contacted.

Keep a copy of the letter. Employers may call to confirm information, the same student could ask for another reference letter at a later date

and it could also be useful to have it for comparison when writing a reference letter for other students. It can take time to write a reference letter but the same is true here as in other areas – practice makes perfect.



## 5. Communication with students

When teachers are asked what the best part of their job is, they almost always describe some aspect of the student-teacher relationship. Whether it be personal conversations in office hours or the satisfaction when class discussions take off, positive communication with students reminds us of why we became teachers and academics. As has been described in previous chapters, you can increase positive communication with students through the use of online technology, office hours and diverse teaching methods.

There are students at the University of Iceland of many different nationalities and with diverse backgrounds that inform their life experiences, inside and outside the classroom. It is important to avoid drawing conclusions about students based on superficial characteristics or ideas about the typical university student. You must promote an open and safe environment for all students, whatever their backgrounds or experiences. This is the best way to ensure that all students feel safe and that they have the support to take on the tasks they are set. This chapter will address some aspects of communication between students and teachers.

### Supporting students

Many things can cause students to feel vulnerable in the University community. It is important to create an environment in which students who need help are comfortable asking for it and don't feel that they are on their own due to their origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or any other demographic variable.

Students struggling in the University community often conceal their troubles until

the examination date or the deadline. One way to identify students who require extra assistance is to set an ungraded pop quiz in the first week of the semester to gauge the students' basic knowledge. You might also set examinations or assignments early in the course and give additional material to students who do poorly, or advise them to seek the help of a student counsellor.

It is important to avoid discouraging students from taking the course, unless there is a good reason to do so. Teachers should invite struggling students in particular to office hours and allow a good chunk of time for finding out why the student is having problems. There could be specific circumstances or personal problems behind the issue that the student may need help resolving. The role of the teacher is first and foremost to help students learn and others may be better suited to helping them resolve various problems.

Higher education can seem overwhelming to new students and some of them may doubt that they are capable of it. Teachers should make reasonable demands of students, encourage and support them, emphasise the positive and avoid harsh language when making comments. Students often trust the teacher's judgement regarding their capabilities; for this reason a simple word of encouragement can inspire a student, while a simple criticism can be crushing. The best way to support students is to keep a balance between encouragement and constructive criticism.

### Disabled students

Disabled students in higher education are as diverse as any other group of university students and it is therefore important to focus on the individual, not the disability. Disabilities are diverse and individual. Generalisations

about a certain kind of disability are rarely correct or constructive. Disabled students work in different ways, even if they have disabilities of a similar nature. In the same vein, other abilities can vary between students.

### Who is disabled?

A disabled individual is one who in some way has limited capabilities due to physical or mental disabilities, i.e. developmental disabilities, mental disabilities, mobility disabilities, visual or hearing impairments or disabilities resulting from chronic illness or an accident.

The circumstances of disabled individuals can vary; the disability may be visible or invisible, congenital or the result of disease or injury, cause many difficulties in daily life or relatively few problems.

### Legal requirements

In accordance with the Act on the Affairs of Disabled People, disabled individuals have the right to access all public state and municipal services, including education, and efforts must always be made to provide people with services in accordance with general legislation. If a disabled individual requires a higher level of service that can be met through standard operations, this individual shall receive service in accordance with the Act on the Affairs of Disabled People.

The University of Iceland has established a policy on the affairs of disabled people with the aim of creating the necessary conditions to enable disabled students and staff to actively participate in University operations. This policy also applies to the general public attending events run by the University. The policy defines disability in a broad sense, covering mobility and sensory disabilities, mental illness, specific

learning difficulties and temporary physical or psychological problems that affect daily life. Information on University policy regarding the affairs of disabled people can be found on the University website.

### Council for the Affairs of Disabled People

A Council for the Affairs of Disabled People, appointed by the University Council, shall oversee the affairs of disabled people at the University of Iceland.

Members of the Council include a student representative, representatives of the University of Iceland Student Counselling and Career Centre and a professional representative of the affairs of disabled people.

The Council is headed by the University of Iceland equal opportunities officer. The Student Counselling and Career Centre oversees the affairs of disabled students and provides disability services on the basis of a professional evaluation by a student counsellor, supported by an expert opinion on the disability of the student in question, his or her circumstances and experiences in higher education.

It is important that teaching staff direct students who ask about facilities and services for disabled people to the Student Counselling and Career Centre. Further information can be found on the Student Counselling and Career Centre website.

### Assistance for disabled students in achieving their academic goals

Disabled students in higher education, University faculties and the Student Counselling and Career Centre are jointly responsible for ensuring that the necessary measures are taken in courses to assist disabled students, without lowering academic demands or changing the course material. The following things can



improve the general learning environment and help disabled students to meet the course requirements.

### **Learning technology courses for dyslexic students**

Dyslexic students far and away make up the largest group of those who require disability services in their studies. Dyslexia is generally defined as a disorder in reading development which cannot be explained by, e.g., limited intelligence, poor social conditions, unsatisfactory teaching or lack of interest. The characteristics of dyslexia can manifest themselves in, e.g., poor reading comprehension, slow reading, difficulty identifying words, trouble taking notes, spelling issues and poor handwriting. The Student Counselling and Career Centre regularly runs learning technology courses specifically designed for the needs of dyslexic students.

### **Information on textbooks and reading material available in good time**

If at all possible, the syllabus should be available around three weeks before teaching starts. If this is not possible, you should at least announce the reading material for the first three weeks of the semester. If information on textbooks and other reading material is made available well in advance, the Student Counselling and Career Centre has time to have alternative versions of the material prepared, e.g. for blind or dyslexic students.

### **A statement in the syllabus**

It is good include a statement directed towards disabled students in the syllabus and go over it in the first class. The statement could be something like this: Students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties who could require disability services should contact the University

of Iceland Student Counselling and Career Centre. The Student Counselling and Career Centre will evaluate your request, propose services on the basis of a professional evaluation by a student counsellor (which shall depend on your circumstances and experiences in your studies, as well as an expert opinion regarding your particular disability/impairment) before implementing appropriate measures. Please contact the Student Counselling and Career Centre as soon as possible to avoid delays in organising the appropriate services. The Student Counselling and Career Centre office is located on the top floor of the University Centre (telephone: 525-4315, email address: [radgjof@hi.is](mailto:radgjof@hi.is)).

### **Handouts and writing on the board**

Handouts and writing on the board serve no use for students who are blind or visually impaired. If there are visually impaired students in the class, the teacher must simultaneously read out loud everything written on the board, as well as describing pictures and other visual information. Use the students' names in discussions so that all students know who is talking and offer visually impaired students the chance to get a copy of the syllabus with larger font or in digital form. It is a good idea to put all material that you hand out in class up on the course website, cf. page 18.

### **Lectures and discussions**

Students who are hearing impaired and use lip reading are unable to follow lectures or discussions if the person talking turns away from them. Therefore, always try to face the students, talk slowly and clearly, although without shouting and avoiding exaggerated lip movements. Make sure you don't obscure your lips with your hands or anything else and avoid standing in front of a window or other light



source, since the glare behind you can make it harder for students to read your lips or your expression. Ask the students to speak one at a time so that hearing impaired students have an easier time following discussions. The Student Counselling and Career Centre will provide students with sign language interpreters if necessary. You can talk to the UI sign language interpreters to get advice and ideas for teaching when a student requires interpreting. If an interpreter is used, you should speak directly to the student, not the interpreter. When using slides or films, you must keep the room bright enough so that the student can see the interpreter. If a written lecture script is available, it is important to get a copy to the interpreter and student in advance.

### Access

Access is one of the the main concerns of students who use wheelchairs or have limited mobility. If a classroom is inaccessible for any student on the course, the faculty office will provide a different room or push for improvements to be made. The University Division of Operations and Resources shall handle improvements in accessibility on the University campus, see page 18.

### Student Counselling and Career Centre Accessibility

The Accessibility Centre of the Student Counselling and Career Centre is located in the University Centre, on the third floor.

The Accessibility Centre has three main roles:

- An examination room for students who need to sit examinations using a computer due to dyslexia, visual impairments or mobility impairments.
- A training centre in which students with dyslexia or impaired vision have the opportunity to try out and learn to use

software that could aid them in their studies.

- Work facilities for students with dyslexia or impaired vision, mobility disabilities or blindness.

As a training centre, the Accessibility Centre is first and foremost intended to serve the large group of students who have been diagnosed with dyslexia or a visual impairment. As an examination room and work space, the Accessibility Centre is intended for all students who require special accommodations in their studies.

### Conflict in the classroom

Using tact around students can prevent various problems. By phrasing questions and criticism carefully, you can avoid putting students on the defensive or making them hostile. Teachers who are encouraging, supportive and respectful of students' ideas are able to correct wrong answers or point out flaws without demoralising the students. It is basic good manners to listen and respond to students' ideas or answers. If the idea is flimsy or unclear, you can ask the student to explain it using the course material rather than immediately shooting it down. Often students manage to reword their ideas such that they become clearer and easier to understand. Teasing or sarcasm on the part of the teacher is of course inappropriate.

Serious conflict can arise between teachers and students – accusations of poor teaching, inconsistent and unfair course assessment, deviation from the stated course requirements and using non-academic criteria in grading. Comments about academic performance (including disagreements over course assessment, academic dishonesty, issues with credits and registration and comments about

faculty management) are common topics of complaint for students. You can avoid such problems, or significantly reduce them, by forming a clear policy right from the start, informing students of it and following it carefully, particularly with regards to course assessment. If problems arise in spite of your best efforts, you can employ the following measures in order to resolve conflict:

- Talking with the student. If the conflict concerns an assistant teacher, he or she should seek the advice of the supervisory teacher immediately. Luckily, most conflict is mutually resolved at this stage. If you expect the conversation to be particularly difficult or taxing it may be a good idea to invite (with the student's consent) a colleague (e.g. a fellow teacher from the faculty or a member of staff from the faculty office or the Centre for Teaching and Learning) to be present to ensure that the meeting serves everybody's best interests. You might also give the student the option of bringing an impartial party, for example a student counsellor.
- When a conflict cannot be resolved with an informal conversation, it is necessary to seek a solution elsewhere. The best party to contact depends on the nature of the conflict – the head of faculty could, for example, act as mediator or the director of examinations could rule on a conflict related to an examination. Teachers believing that their rights have been violated can contact the Division of Human Resources, who count a lawyer amongst their personnel. If unsure who to contact over a matter of

this nature, you can seek advice from the Centre for Teaching and Learning.

## Equality

The University of Iceland includes the University Council Equal Rights Committee, an equal rights committee for the central administration and an equal rights committee in each of the five schools. An ambitious Equal Rights Policy exists which addresses equality in a broad sense. This policy includes many kinds of provisional and target-orientated projects that all University staff should familiarise themselves with.

The University of Iceland has set a policy regarding gender-related and sexual harassment and other sexual violence, which clearly states that such behaviour is not tolerated at the University. Rules of procedure on the response to such behaviour may be found on [jafnretti.hi.is](http://jafnretti.hi.is). This site also includes information on the Professional Council that handles such cases.

Controversial issues can come up regarding prejudiced discourse. Prejudice is generally born of ignorance and it can be important to look to your colleagues for advice and information. The University of Iceland contains a working equal opportunities officer and equal rights committees, as well as many academics in fields relating to equality, e.g. gender studies, multicultural studies, disability studies, queer studies etc. It can be a good idea to seek other opinions if you are accused of prejudice or complaints are made of a prejudiced atmosphere or discourse within the classroom.

Closely related to prejudiced discourse is pornification. Pornification both marginalises and degrades certain groups, though women in particular. It is very important to challenge pornified discourse no matter what form it takes.

Further information can be found at [english.hi.is/university/equality\\_ui](http://english.hi.is/university/equality_ui). This site also includes the University Equal Rights Policy and more resources regarding equality. Rules of procedure on bullying at the University of Iceland can be found on the University website – bullying is not tolerated at the University.

### Disturbances in class

Students occasionally cause disturbances in class and it sometimes proves difficult to stop them or reason with them. This section will discuss a few common incidents of this kind and strategies to resolve them.

#### Arguments in class

If arguments break out in class or a student makes a comment that causes a disturbance, the role of the teacher is to keep the peace so that students can work.

There are two sides to this task. First of all, you need to maintain a safe environment for the students by preventing arguments from turning into attacks on either an individual student or a certain group that a student may identify with. In such circumstances, you must stay calm even if a student is antagonistic; calm behaviour increases students' trust in the teacher.

Secondly, you must stay alert to the learning opportunities that such an experience might entail. Is it valuable for the students to hear different points of view or encounter ideas that challenge conventional stereotypes? Might you, in some way, use the topic of the argument to further the course objectives? Or would the students' studies be best served by deflating the tension and quickly redirecting the students? When discussions between students become more heated than you would like, it is a good idea to try and redirect the argument into a productive discussion:

- What is actually happening? Is the student simply taking out frustration on fellow students? Is the student passionately expressing his or her own sincere views? Is it a case of misunderstanding?
- Encourage students to discuss ideas in the classroom, not individuals.
- Encourage students to gather all possible arguments that would support opposing points of view. This can make the students less judgemental and promote reflection.
- If the topic of the argument does not fall under the goals of the discussion period, the teacher might offer to continue the discussion after class or ask interested students to send their thoughts via email.

If a student antagonises or criticises you, you must keep calm and try to ensure that something positive comes out of the interaction:

- What is the student's complaint or provocation about? It is best to rise above any rudeness, but if you respond to the complaint the student's position and attitude may improve.
- Keep calm and try to avoid harsh criticism no matter how agitated the student becomes.
- Avoid using your power as a teacher to act as though you know better; although in some cases this may be true, this will rarely convince students and it prevents an active exchange of views.
- Use logic when you disagree with students and ask them to present reasoning for their position. If the

argument concerns course material, you might ask other students to assess the reasoning presented by both parties.

- Avoid getting into power struggles with students. If teachers respond to negative comments from students in kind, there is a danger that this will be seen as an abuse of power.
- If students are very upset, it is best to ask them to take their complaints to the head of faculty or the supervisory teacher, as appropriate.

Generally, teaching staff should respond to provocation calmly and avoid making an issue of minor incidents. Conflict in the classroom can be used as an opportunity to reinforce your teaching goals – arguments can be used to explain material, encourage critical thinking, promote open mindedness and increase the students' trust in you.

### **An overbearing student**

Students who talk more than their fair share can disrupt class. When one student is overbearing towards other people in the classroom, you must take measures to ensure that other students concentrate and participate.

- Ask other students to say what they think about the talkative student's ideas and suggest other perspectives.
- Try methods designed to involve the whole student group, such as holding a vote, dividing the group into pairs or having each student briefly respond to a question, problem or provocative quotation.
- If overbearing students seem to be genuinely interested, teachers might

meet with them in private, thank them for their interest and participation and ask them for advice on how best to encourage other students to participate. Teachers could let such students know that they want all students to participate equally and ask them to 'work together with you' on the issue (e.g. by not answering questions immediately and thereby giving other students a chance or by wording comments such that they encourage others to answer).

- If the student asks too many questions that divert the attention of other students, you might ask the group how many of them want you to spend the class answering certain questions. If the group votes against it, you can offer to answer the student's question after class or during office hours.

Talkative students, even those who have a disruptive impact, often feel that they are showing interest and engagement; you must show them that you appreciate their interest in the course, at the same time as helping them find a better way to express it.

### **Silent students**

Some days the silence in the classroom can be overwhelming. You must create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom to minimise awkward silences and encourage as many students as possible to actively participate.

- Learn the students' names and make sure that all the students know each others' names.
- Create a safe environment by responding positively to all feedback from students, even if you have to

correct their assertions. Thank students individually for their contributions and try to find the kernel of a correct, or better worded, answer in a student's answer. Give students the chance to revise or explain their answers.

- Prepare students for group discussions by having them first discuss the material in pairs or spend a few minutes writing down their answers to the question. This makes it easier for shy students to open up.
- Do not put silent students on the spot unless you have developed a practice of asking students who haven't said anything of their own accord. If students feel embarrassed, it is even more unlikely that they will become active participants in discussions.
- If you decide to begin the practice of asking students who don't speak up of their own accord, you should start with questions that don't have just one correct answer or questions where the students have to choose between a number of possible options. This way it is more likely that students will be able to answer questions without being embarrassed or frustrated.
- Require students to attend office hours at the beginning of the semester. A personal acquaintance with students can encourage them to participate in class.
- Consider asking silent students to send their thoughts in an email before or after class. Some students will gladly accept this offer. If they send the teacher an email before class, you have the opportunity to get them involved in the discussion at an appropriate point.

If students send an email after class, they have had the chance to consider and compose their answers without the pressure they feel in the classroom.

Talking to students in private can also help. There are many possible reasons for the silence. One silent student may simply enjoy listening. Another may lack the self-confidence needed to contribute. Some students are quiet by nature; others could struggle with a speech impediment or another kind of personal difficulty that prevents them from expressing themselves in class. Some, perhaps, do not wish to express themselves out of a fear of prejudice, e.g. gay or trans students – it is important that teachers establish a safe environment within the classroom and use diverse examples so that everyone has a positive experience and feels they are part of the group. Other students are unprepared and shy of admitting it and will continue to be silent even after being gently encouraged to speak. This is within their rights and of course you must respect that.

### Excuses from students

It can be difficult, not least for new teaching staff, to decide how to respond to various excuses from students. There is no single perfect policy – some honest students will always have to accept being penalised for circumstances beyond their control and in the same vein other students will get off lightly due to imaginative excuses. The best way is to set out a policy, inform the students of it at the beginning of the semester and allow yourself a certain amount of flexibility if genuinely difficult situations come up. Some examples:

- Offering all students a certain amount of leeway which they can use as they see fit. For example, a one-day extension to be used for a single

assignment or the option to skip one assignment per semester if there are a lot of assignments for the course.

- A standard grade deduction as a penalty for late submissions. The penalty should be enough to encourage students to submit their assignments on time but not so much that it discourages students from submitting anything at all.
- All excuses connected to other courses, travel for competitions or events the students know about well in advance must be discussed before the deadline or examination date.
- Some students feel uncomfortable excusing themselves, even if there is a valid reason. You might give students the option of including comments with big projects or examinations if they feel their performance did not reflect their ability or preparation. Inform them that it will not affect the grade for the project or examination, but could be considered in the final grade.

Sometimes students' excuses are only borderline plausible, or begin to add up one after the other as more deadlines pass. In such cases, teachers should discuss their concerns with the student and ask for reasonable proof of the excuses given. This is often enough to prompt procrastinating students to straighten themselves out. If the problem is that the student has used too many excuses, you must discuss responsibility, time management and fairness towards you and the other students. You can seek assistance from the Student Counselling and Career Centre and mention services that foster good working practices for students.

Above all, teachers should care about their students. There are various problems that can make students' lives harder, when they generally have enough on their plates to begin with. Teachers should not award grades or credits to students which they have not earned, but they must be able to put themselves in the students' shoes and help them get things back on track.

### Complaints over grades

Unavoidably, some students will complain if they receive a lower grade than they were expecting. Teachers even receive complaints over very good grades – that they were not even higher! Students these days are under more pressure than in the past. The proliferation of universities and graduates can cause students to believe that they need a near perfect grade sheet to achieve their goals, e.g. to get their dream job or be accepted into postgraduate studies at a foreign university. You will be more successful in dealing with complaints if you respond quickly. There are also several ways to reduce the likelihood of complaints:

- Inform students at the beginning of the course what is expected of them with regards to course assessment.
- Provide them with criteria for a good essay or examples of outstanding examination answers.
- Provide detailed feedback on assignments including discussion of strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for improvement.
- Give students the chance to submit drafts of essays which are not graded but returned with comments and guidelines on how to best complete the assignment.



- Have ready examples of students' assignments or examinations which show the distribution of grades; this will make it easier to explain to other students why they did not get the grade they hoped for.

If students challenge their grades, they must be informed that any review could lead to a lower grade. If the complaint concerns the decisions of an assistant teacher, it may be directed to the supervisory teacher for the course. In cases where there is no obvious solution, students shall refer comments on course assessment to the director of examinations, who shall rule on the matter.

### Advising students

Whether teachers are permanent members of staff, sessional teachers or assistant teachers, many students will turn to them for advice on various matters. Every so often, they may find themselves in the position of needing to advise students on something that falls outside their academic purview. Some teachers find this an uncomfortable position to be in. It is challenging for all teachers to find a balance between respecting the boundaries defined by their position and wanting to give a student as much as support as possible.

#### Knowing your limits

It is not possible to expect teachers to take on the role of psychologist, although they may often take the role of caring and understanding supporter. Trust your instincts and direct the student to the Student Counselling and Career Centre if you feel that the nature of the problem calls for specialist help.

### Listening

Listening has often been called an art, but it is also a skill which can be acquired. Hold back with your advice while students share their problems or ask questions. Concentrate on understanding their views and thoughts and give them as much time and leeway as you can to fully speak their minds.

#### Help with defining worries

Sometimes students simply need a chance to work out what it is that is bothering them without being given direct advice. It may help students to explain what is worrying them by discussing the thoughts and emotions they express. When the teacher and student have understood the problem, you can offer assistance if the student wants it.

### Support

Teachers can offer support by showing concern, understanding and compassion and making it clear that they care about the student. However, support does not mean that teachers have to agree with students on everything – only that they care about the students' wellbeing.

#### More options

Students often suggest the best solutions themselves, but teachers can help students assess and use their own strengths and outside support to solve problems, as well as suggesting options if the student so wishes. This should only happen, however, after students have tried to resolve the issue themselves. If the problem is simply a lack of information, you are required to supply that information or direct the student to someone who can.

**Follow up**

Teaching staff who have helped a student in making a decision or dealing with a problem of some kind should contact the student a while later to ask how things are going. The answer could be rewarding, if your advice proved useful, or indicate where you could have done better.

**Services from the Student Counselling and Career Centre**

The Student Counselling and Career Centre provides students with, e.g., personal and psychological advice. Employees include a psychologist and several student counsellors.

The Student Counselling and Career Centre offers short-term therapy for students struggling with psychological problems whilst studying at the University. Such therapy involves identifying the trouble and assisting students in understanding their problems. In consultation with the student, a solution is sought to improve the student's wellbeing and ability to study.

Student Counselling and Career Centre personnel can also assist students who struggle with chronic emotional problems. Such services may be conducted within the Centre, or students may be helped to find the best place to get assistance.

When teachers realise that their efforts to help a student are not enough and that the student may need professional help, they should direct him or her to the Student Counselling and Career Centre. Teachers should discuss this with the student and make it clear that the process is neither complicated nor difficult.

When students contact teachers directly in search of assistance, there is a danger that they will take it as a personal rejection if a teacher directs them to another party; they may even

interpret it as indifference rather than concern. To avoid misunderstandings of this kind, you must listen to students, show them understanding and compassion and make it clear that the referral is a way to find the best solution to their problems.

When referring a student to an expert it is important to realise that people have different attitudes towards seeking professional help. These attitudes can range from firm opposition to unequivocal agreement and may vary according to the student's age and sex, as well as background. The general attitude towards seeking help has become more positive in recent years, although snap judgements based on inaccurate information can still be found. Talking about this can reduce the student's fear and doubts.

The first step in a referral is to go over such matters with the student and try to explain the process. Explain that seeking help if you need it can be a helpful opportunity to get to know yourself and a sign of strength rather than an admission of failure or weakness. Make it clear that communications between students and the Student Counselling and Career Centre are confidential, as are conversations between you and the student.

Further information on services offered by the Student Counselling and Career Centre can be found on the University of Iceland website or at their office on the third floor of the University Centre (telephone 525-4315, email address [radgjof@hi.is](mailto:radgjof@hi.is)).

## 6. Methods for improving teaching

Being a good teacher is not an innate talent – first and foremost it is the result of experience and training. The key to being a good teacher is, amongst other things, giving yourself time to think about your teaching, seeking and using diverse feedback and monitoring changes in student performance. The UI Centre for Teaching and Learning helps teaching staff in various ways to evaluate and improve their teaching.

### Teaching evaluation

At the end of each semester a teaching evaluation survey is submitted to students at the University of Iceland in which they evaluate teaching and the implementation of those courses they have taken over the semester.

The teaching evaluation survey is an important tool that provides teaching staff with feedback on the course and ideas for how to improve it. Although research shows that teaching evaluation surveys are generally reliable, this does not necessarily mean that they promote improved teaching.

The results of the teaching evaluation survey in and of themselves do not seem to inspire teaching staff to make changes. Changes are more likely if teaching staff discuss the teaching evaluation with experienced colleagues or teaching advisers, for example at the UI Centre for Teaching and Learning.

Poor student turnout for the teaching evaluation survey has been a cause for concern amongst academic affairs administrators at UI. Students claim, for example, that their comments fall on deaf ears, which often is not the case. One way to challenge these ideas is to

present the results of last year's teaching evaluation survey to a new student group and explain changes you have made to your teaching methods due to comments from students.

### There are also other methods for evaluating a course:

- A survey in the middle of the semester is submitted to students at the University of Iceland. This survey contains two questions about what is going well in the course and what could be done better. The student is also asked to grade the course on the scale 1-10. The teacher takes the students' comments into consideration and discusses with them any changes that will be made.
- Informal chats with students after class or during office hours. What is going well with the teaching and what could be better? Choose students who will not shy away from answering such questions, but at the same time make sure they don't feel they are being put on the spot.
- A friend, colleague or expert from the Centre for Teaching and Learning attends class and observes your teaching. Employees at the Centre for Teaching and Learning include people with extensive knowledge and experience of teaching matters. If a friend or a colleague observes you, you must explain what it is that you require feedback on in particular. Colleagues tend to focus solely on the content of the teaching, but pay less attention to the students' reactions and how ideas are presented.

- **Recording.** This method enables teaching staff to observe their own teaching from the point of view of the students. Most teachers feel nervous about recording a class but generally feel more confident and interested once it has been done.
- **Mid-semester review.** If a teacher so requests, the Centre for Teaching and Learning can send a representative to class to carry out a mid-semester review. The representative sits in on the class and when there are 20 minutes remaining, the teacher leaves the room and the representative takes over. Students are divided into groups and are asked a few questions about teaching on the course, e.g. what they think is done well, what could be fixed, etc. To conclude, the groups present their answers to the Centre for Teaching and Learning representative, who then summarises their conclusions, identifies where the students agree and explains any disagreements. Finally, the teacher receives a report with conclusions and advice on how to improve his or her teaching.

The services of the Centre for Teaching and Learning are not only intended for permanent teaching staff at the University of Iceland – sessional teachers and assistant teachers are welcome to contact the Centre for Teaching and Learning to request a help.

### Monitoring student progression

How can you ensure that students attain the learning outcomes for the course? Having someone observe classes and evaluate them provides you with excellent information on students' opinions of the teaching. However, it

does not tell you much about how well they are learning. Changes to course assessment methods can significantly improve the effectiveness of your teaching and also provide instant feedback on what works and what doesn't.

Generally, teachers assess the performance and knowledge of their students by setting examinations and essays, often only around the middle and at the end of the semester. This means that a teacher supervising a large introductory course might, for example, not realise before the final examination that the students consistently confused two important and related points. Other teaching staff, who regularly check the students' work – for example by having them complete assignments – might assume that written assignments help them attain some of the course's learning outcomes, such as developing their general problem-solving skills. However, there are students who do well on assignments but are unable to apply their knowledge in new situations created for the examination; they have learnt to follow the examples in the course material without understanding the key principles involved in solving the problems.

In recent years, teaching staff in various subjects have developed methods for informally assessing student learning. Such methods can generate useful and timely feedback on student learning. Because these assessment methods are designed to measure the effectiveness of teaching and the quality of learning taking place (not to identify which students are learning and which are not) they are generally anonymous. As a rule, these anonymous assignments can be completed quickly and focus in particular on three points: (1) checking the students' academic skills and progress (for example whether students have sufficient basic

knowledge or academic ability to handle the next topic), (2) students' self-assessment of their own academic skills (for example whether they feel prepared to learn new material from textbooks without going over it in class) and (3) students' reactions to various teaching methods, material and assignments (for example whether students feel that an examination reflects the material the courses focuses on). Based on this feedback, teachers can adjust their teaching to make it easier for the students to learn.

Experts at the Centre for Teaching and Learning can advise teachers on potential course assessment methods. The Centre also houses a good selection of reading material on university teaching.

### Developing your own teaching

Most teachers view teaching as an intensely personal matter. Whilst they are required and prepared to allow their colleagues to criticise their writing, it is unlikely that they would invite them into the classroom to observe and comment. However, teaching is like any other area of academic work – a skill – and good feedback makes it easier to master that skill.

If you decide to significantly reform your teaching, the Centre for Teaching and Learning can help you to identify specific skills and technology conducive to improving your teaching methods. This applies in particular if a teacher is not entirely clear on what it is that needs improving. Feedback from student group reviews has sometimes been enough to prompt teachers to revise their questioning techniques or assessment criteria. For others, it has taken a considerable amount of time to acquire better working practices with regards to organisation and presentation. The most important factor in

each case is the teacher's willingness to accept the need for change and try new methods.

In many cases, it could be enough to seek advice from experienced colleagues, ask the students for their opinions or do some research using the books at the Centre for Teaching and Learning. Whatever steps the teacher then takes to improve teaching will in all likelihood be worth the effort, professionally as well as personally. All over the world, universities are to an ever greater extent demanding that teaching staff put as much effort into their teaching as their research. When it is successful, teaching can be a source of great personal fulfilment and satisfaction.

The Centre for Teaching and Learning website includes further information on courses for teaching staff and other services available to them.

### Services from the Centre for Teaching and Learning

#### The start of teaching

A course is held at the beginning of the academic year for new teaching staff, addressing the most important factors in university teaching, as well as the various services open to teaching staff. The course is intended for permanent teaching staff at UI and sessional teachers. A shorter course of the same nature is held at the beginning of the spring semester.

#### Advice

Experts from the Centre for Teaching and Learning can advise teaching staff on anything related to teaching. An adviser from the Centre for Teaching and Learning could observe a class, carefully look over recorded teaching, suggest certain improvements or discuss specific problems and indicate possible solutions. All advice is confidential.



### Student group review

An adviser from the Centre for Teaching and Learning attends a class in the middle of the semester and divides the students into small groups, the teacher having left the room. Each group has ten minutes to choose a spokesperson and come to an agreement on what they value in the course, what could be improved and what changes they would wish to see. The adviser gathers the results and discusses them with the teacher in private. Teachers may also have a teaching evaluation survey conducted in the middle of the semester, in addition to the conventional teaching evaluation survey which is conducted at the end of each semester.

### Lectures and courses

The Centre for Teaching and Learning holds many lectures and courses each year on teaching studies, information technology and related material. Information on courses currently available can be found in the Centre for Teaching and Learning website ([www.kemst.hi.is](http://www.kemst.hi.is)) – courses are also announced by email to the hi-starf mailing list and in the Ugla notification system. The same website also includes recordings of lectures and seminars held by the Centre for Teaching and Learning.

### Checklist for the integration of the equality dimension in teaching

A checklist for integrating the equality dimension in teaching is available from the Centre for Teaching and Learning and the UI equal opportunities officer. The equal opportunities officer is also available to discuss other issues concerning equality both in teaching and other areas.

### Available books

The Centre for Teaching and Learning has an excellent collection of books and videos about university teaching. Teaching staff can borrow material from the Centre for Teaching and Learning as well as receiving assistance from the Centre's staff. It is also worth mentioning that the School of Education library has a good deal of material on teaching.

### Technology in teaching

Centre for Teaching and Learning staff shall assist teachers who wish to use technology in their teaching, e.g. touch screens, writing tablets, eMission recordings or the learning management system Moodle.

**All further information will be provided by the Centre for Teaching and Learning, telephone 525-4447, email address [kemst@hi.is](mailto:kemst@hi.is).**





## 7. Staff services

### Information on operations

The University of Iceland website, [www.english.hi.is](http://www.english.hi.is), includes information on the operations of UI. Information concerning employees, e.g. the Staff Handbook, can be found in Uglya, under 'Employee'.

The **UI Yearbook** includes information on the operations of the various faculties, institutes and schools of UI. It is available from the UI Information Desk in the Main Building and on the UI website under 'Publications'.

### Induction of new staff at the University of Iceland

A special event is offered once a semester to welcome new staff to the University with short presentations and a greeting from the rector. A comparable event in English is available for international staff. In brief, the programme includes a presentation from the Head of the Division of Human Resources on various practical information, a presentation from the Head of IT Services on the University's computer system and finally a visit to the Rector's Office and a welcome from the rector. This is followed by a tour around the Main Building and University Centre.

The event ends with special presentations for new teaching and research staff on University funds, research and professional evaluation. The event is managed by a project manager from the Division of Human Resources.

### Facilities for meetings and functions

**Skólabær, Suðurgata 26.** This building is well equipped for receptions, presentations,

meetings and parties. Skólabær is available for employees to rent for both work-related and personal events. Further information is available from the Rector's Office, telephone: 525-4303/4302.

**Meeting facilities.** It is possible to hire the University's teaching facilities for conferences, courses and lectures. Further information is available from the Buildings and Facilities unit at [kennslustofur@hi.is](mailto:kennslustofur@hi.is), telephone number 525-5112.

**The Ceremonial Hall in the Main Building** is available to rent. It is perfectly equipped for lectures, symposiums and conferences. The University Council meeting room can accommodate around 18 people. Further information is available from the Rector's Office, telephone: 525-4303/4302.

The Centre for Technological Innovation has free meeting facilities and reasonably priced facilities for courses. The Nordic House has small meeting rooms available for rent as well as a larger meeting hall.

## Exercise and health

### Gymnasium

The University runs a gymnasium for staff and students. It includes a sports and weight-lifting room, changing rooms, showers and a sauna. There are also regular gymnastics classes and other exercise classes.

### Eye and vision protection

The University of Iceland has produced working procedures concerning eye and vision protection for staff. If an employee requires, in the opinion of an optician, vision-correction equipment due to working with screens, the University will contribute to the cost of purchasing glasses and also pay for the doctor's examination.

## Education

### Open lectures

Various lectures and events are open to staff and the public. These are advertised to the HI-starf mailing list, on the UI website and in newspapers. Entrance to such lectures is free and everybody is welcome.

### Teaching under the auspices of UI

Staff have the option of attending classes/lectures free of charge with the permission of the teacher of the course in question. If they sit any examinations, staff must meet the stated admission requirements and pay the registration fee in full.

**The UI Continuing Education Institute** is located at Dunhagi 7. The Institute organises diverse education for the University community and the public. Permanent staff at UI receive a 20% discount on culture and language courses. If five or more employees attend the same course they receive a 20% discount – this applies to all courses at the Continuing Education Institute.

See further details at <http://www.endurmenntun.is>.

The University of Iceland Language Centre organises many kinds of language courses to meet the needs of staff and students. It is open to all staff and students at the University who want to teach themselves another language. The Language Centre offers a wide selection of study materials for language learning, supported by the latest information technology. It also has the facilities for teachers and students to work together in small groups. The Language Centre is located in Nýi Garður. Further information can be found at [www.english.hi.is/university/the\\_language\\_centre](http://www.english.hi.is/university/the_language_centre).

**The University of Iceland Press** is located at Dunhagi 18. It serves teaching staff and institutes within UI with regards to all kinds of publication. The University of Iceland Press publishes academic works, original or translated, for use in teaching and/or academic work within the University as well as for the general market. Further information can be found on the Press' website, [www.haskolautgafan.hi.is/en](http://www.haskolautgafan.hi.is/en).

## Other

### Computers, software and mobile telephones.

In the Centre for Technological Innovation, there is a special service desk run by Computing Services for staff and students. The desk is on the first floor and is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. all working days. The desk offers assistance regarding various computer issues, ADSL connections and the University Wi-Fi. The telephone number for the service desk is 525-4222, email address [help@hi.is](mailto:help@hi.is). The University is party to a so-called 'Campus' agreement

concerning the use and set-up of Microsoft software for staff. Teachers and permanent staff in 37% employment or higher can get the software on their home computers from the Computing Services, subject to the approval of their immediate superior. This applies to those staff who have a username. It is also worth mentioning the ADSL service from Computing Services and information on the University's wireless internet.

Staff can receive a discount on tariffs from Síminn for use of a mobile telephone in connection with their work. Further information is available from the service desk personnel. It is also worth mentioning the Computing Services website: [www.rhi.hi.is](http://www.rhi.hi.is).

### Lunch money

Employees who are members of the Association of Academics or the Federation of State and Municipal Employees, do not have access to a cafeteria, are in 50% (FSME) / 60% (AA) employment or higher and work between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. on week days have the right to receive lunch money. Further information is available from staff in the University of Iceland Payroll Department, in the Main Building on Sæmundargata, telephone number 525 4390.

This list is not exhaustive and further information can be found in the Staff Handbook in Ugla.



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