

Overview of the American University Classroom

American college courses are meant to advance knowledge. Learning on the college level requires that students connect themselves with information and materials and actively participate in class.

What are standard instructional times?

Universities operating on the semester format offer 3-unit classes that meet for 150 instructional minutes (50 minutes per unit per week) weekly for 15 weeks (plus a final exam). This is equivalent to three meetings of 50 minutes (i.e., MWF 10:00-10:50 am), two meetings of 75 minutes (i.e., TTh 9:30-10:45 am), or one meeting of 150 minutes (i.e., W, 4:00-6:45 pm with a 15 minute break). Most classes are offered between Monday – Friday 8:00 am – 7:00 pm. A few classes are offered in the 7:00-9:45 pm slots or on Saturdays. Classes may also be offered 100% online or in a hybrid online format.

What equipment is available in the classroom?

There are multiple sizes of classrooms at the university. Lecture halls may accommodate 100-300+ students; large classrooms may accommodate 60 students; small classrooms may accommodate 25-40 students; and seminar classrooms are designed for 10-15 students. Small and seminar classrooms may have tables and chairs to facilitate small group discussion. Many American university classrooms are “smart,” meaning that they are equipped with an Internet-connected computer with wireless keyboard and mouse, as well as a ceiling-mounted presentation system. Classrooms also come equipped with whiteboards (a few engineering/mathematics classrooms still have chalkboards) and an overhead projector. A growing problem is that most classrooms include few electrical outlets, which requires students to come prepared with a charged digital device.

What does the course syllabus include?

The course syllabus is considered a legal contract in the American University classroom, and as a result, is often 7 or more pages. It includes faculty and course information, the course calendar and daily assignments, grading policies, directions and scoring guides for class assignments, general education requirements, and an emergency and academic dishonesty policies.

How does the instructor deliver lectures?

Many instructors use Powerpoint to deliver lectures. Most faculty have access to the university Learning Management System (LMS), where they can post lectures, handouts, and important websites for student access. Ideally, the instructor enters the classroom a few minutes early, accesses his presentation via the LMS, and is ready to go! The emphasis is on having students bring their own printed copies of materials, or to use a digital device to access them during class. Other than digital presentations, many instructors still deliver lectures on a whiteboard.

Instructors often use active learning strategies to promote student engagement and achievement. This includes small group activities, pair sharing, response to student questions, and student recitation (response to instructor questions).

What do students do?

What goes on in the classroom is a negotiation of roles between the instructor and students, and the ultimate success is dependent upon both. The instructor expects that students have read and are prepared to discuss assignments and projects to enhance and bring about student learning. Usually, the instructor begins the semester by explaining how they would like students to participate. Most view participation as a way for the

class to discuss the material as a group and they welcome student interaction through questions and comments during class.

Class discussions and activities are often necessary to learn. Student contributions to the discussion should be well thought out and address the subject in depth or detail. It is critical for shy students to participate. Although participation may be difficult in the beginning, instructors and peers are there to support and help classmates make contributions. Often times, instructors offer small group activities that facilitate contributions from shy students.

Below are things that instructors expect and encourage students to do:

In Class	Before Class	After Class
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ask questions• take notes• practice solving problems presented during lectures• contribute during small group or pair activities• respond to instructor questions• focus attention on the instructor• listen when peers ask questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• complete all assignments• prepare discussion questions or points of clarification to ask• meet with fellow students to discuss ideas• review the syllabus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• complete assignments• review notes• write up ideas for questions for next week• come to office hours

How do instructors assess students?

Instructors have many ways of assessing students, and these include formative and summative assessments. Summative assessments include examinations, group projects, individual research projects or essays, short quizzes, multimedia products, oral presentations, portfolios, and class participation and attendance.

What happens when a student fails?

Instructors have very different grading practices that are influenced by the university, discipline, and individual practice. Some allow make-up work or extra credit; others do not. Some departments encourage specific grade distributions, and not adhering to such guidelines may negatively impact the instructor's retention and tenure.

Most American universities allow a student to repeat the course to earn a better grade. Often times there are limits to the number of times a student may repeat a course. If a student has a medical or personal emergency, the instructor may give the student an Incomplete (with an allowance of 6-12 months to make up the grade). Students with continued poor academic performance will be put on probation and even removed from the university.

Additional Resources

See <http://www.21stcenturyprofessor.com/what-goes-on-in-university-classrooms.html> for video clips.

Expectations of an American University Professor

Below is a list of responsibilities for an American university professor. Teaching and research loads vary; Research 1¹ (R1) universities have high expectations for research. Research 2 (R2) institutions usually have fewer expectations for research and higher expectations for teaching. Liberal Arts and Community colleges may or may not have research expectations.

Teaching	Research	Service
<p>Classroom Teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare syllabi, lectures, lab experiments/activities, and class activities for traditional and online instruction • Prepare, administer, and assess student exams and assignments • Calculate grades • Meet with students outside class for help • Maintain currency by integrating new content into existing courses • Develop new courses <p>Related to Teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervise and evaluate graduate student teaching • Evaluate teaching by colleagues • Lead field trips • Attend department colloquia <p>Teaching and Supervision of Graduate Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in application interviews • Supervise graduate student research • Help graduate students with their research • Read, make suggestions to improve, and evaluate M.S. and Ph.D. student theses proposals and products • Read and evaluate written M.S. and Ph.D. comprehensive exams • Participate in Ph.D. oral comprehensive exams • Participate in graduate student defenses <p>Additional Student Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise students regarding course selection • Counsel students on careers opportunities and choices • Write letters of recommendation for students seeking jobs • Write letters of recommendation for students applying to graduate schools 	<p>Research Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct ground-breaking verifiable and publishable scholarly research • Write papers for publication in academic journals • Present research at meetings of scholarly societies • Give presentations at other institutions of higher education • Read scholarly journals to remain current in field • Maintain laboratories for faculty and student research <p>Grantsmanship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write grant proposals for submission to funding agencies • Implement and evaluate successful funded projects • Monitor spending from grants obtained from funding agencies • Serve on review committees of funding agencies <p>Professional Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review papers submitted to academic journals • Review grant proposals submitted to funding agencies • Serve as editor for academic journals • Serve on committees and in elected positions of scholarly societies 	<p>Service to University, College, and Department</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in program, departmental, college faculty meetings • Serve on program, departmental, college, university committees • Participate in departmental, college, university retreats, convocations, commencement • Serve in departmental, college, university administrative positions • Participate in or host faculty searches • Serve on Faculty Senate • Respond to information requests from administrators • Support junior and part-time faculty <p>Service to Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to public queries in faculty areas of specialization • Perform public service in faculty areas of specialization

¹ *Research 1 University* is a category that the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education has used to indicate universities in the United States that engage in extensive research activity.

