

## **MAKING THE FIRST CLASS COUNT: A “PEEP” Show**

San Antonio College, founded in 1925, serves a diverse set of students. With a head count of about 22,000 credit students for both fall and spring semesters, we add to the mix another approximately 14,000 CE participants every year. That is a lot of students!

It also is a lot of beginnings. Through our faculty development program, under the umbrella of our Raul S. Muguia Learning Institute (MLI), we offer our teachers a variety of presentations on improving their effectiveness in the classroom. One of the topics covered is entitled: Making the First Class Count.

Many of us can recall entering a college class on the first day, receiving a syllabus of some sort, and then being dismissed. We remember equally well other classes, where within the first ten minutes the instructor was already “hip deep” into his or her subject matter.

Another view is that it is far more effective to invest your energy that first class day into setting the proper tone than it is to shorten class or start with content. I call the method used to set that tone the “PEEP” show.

PEEP: A brief introduction designed to stimulate and excite. A sneak preview.

**PERSPECTIVE:** Offer your students some insight into **what** you will be studying, **why** it is relevant, and **how** the course fits into a bigger picture. This broad scale viewpoint will reduce the chance of your classes getting “bogged down” and asking themselves (and each other), “why are we doing this stuff.” Placing the proper contextual framework around the subject matter helps the student’s vision. It is equally important to ask the students how they see the class fitting into their world. Their answers and insight will most likely give you a better clue as to who your audience is within the confines of each particular class. This feedback allows you to “customize” the class (to the extent you select) in order to help them accomplish their goals.

**EXPERIENCES:** Letting the students get to know you as it relates to your struggles and successes with the material is an important connection device. How much you open up depends a great deal on your own comfort. None of us can claim complete mastery of our discipline and to acknowledge that makes us more “real” to our classes. This point is brought home very well in Ken Bain’s book, What The Best College Teachers Do (Harvard Press, 2004). Often the adult learner will bring a wealth of knowledge to the class setting as well. I try to honor and respect those experiences rather than ignore them, by seeking out background information about my students at the same time I investigate the expectations that are outlined below.

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EXPECTATIONS: Effective instructors can and do articulate what they hope the class can achieve, both for each session and for the course overall. If you don't have a well defined vision of the course's purpose, how can the students? Don't forget to seek input from the class as to what they hope the course can do for them. One technique to obtain all three of the above key points is to ask every class member to submit in writing a statement of what they hope to get from the experience of being in your class. Review their ideas and give the statement back to them the last week of class. It serves as a powerful reminder of how far they have come (or not) during the semester under your guidance. I personally like to review these statements a couple of times during the semester as a "refresher" of who I am dealing with in that particular class.

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS: Be clear and consistent in your explanation of how you plan to keep score in your class and then follow through. Offer examples of acceptable and not acceptable work as illustrations. Helping your students understand the style and format of work you demand of them does not lower any standards of performance. Rather it solidifies what must be done in a real and concrete manner. Being supportive and encouraging does not have to translate into being weak or easy.

These ideas all must be moderated to an extent, based upon three caveats we discussed before.

1. You and your own unique "brand" of teaching.
2. The students you are serving at the time.
3. The conditions/environment under which you are teaching.