

Improving Your Teaching

Adapted with permission from Stanford University, Center for Teaching & Learning

There are several ways to find out if you are meeting your goals as a teacher:

- **Ask the students.** Give out a course evaluation midway through the semester. The Center For Teaching (CFT) has forms you can use, or you can make up your own. All departments distribute and collect course evaluations at the end of each semester. You can add your own questions if you want feedback, for example, on specific aspects of your teaching or on particular innovations you introduced.
- **Ask a faculty member.** Have someone from the faculty sit in on your class. This is highly advisable in any case, since you may want a recommendation for a teaching job some day. Choose someone with experience, preferably in the course you are teaching, and someone whose opinion you respect. An experienced TA in your department also can provide helpful feedback.
- **Watch yourself on videotape.** In some departments, you can arrange to have your class videotaped, and then you can see for yourself what your strong and weak points are. If you wish, a peer or faculty member can watch the tape with you and help you assess your teaching.

If you wish to improve your teaching skills, working as a TA at the University will provide you with a great opportunity. When you enter the job market, whether in or out of academia, you'll find a successful teaching record is a strong asset.

- **Practice.** If you know what aspects of your teaching need work, you will find they improve with time, just because you are thinking about them. Repeat the evaluative steps after a few months to see how you are doing. Or, ask a friend or colleague to observe you in a dry run.
- **Observe successful teachers.** There are many outstanding teachers at this university. Sit in on sections of successful TAs in your department, especially if they are teaching the same course. Or ask popular professors if you can sit in on their undergraduate courses. The CFT has a list of Distinguished Teaching Award winners and Lilly Teaching Fellows and Mentors. We also have videotapes of successful teachers you can watch.
- **Learn about teaching.** The CFT has a library of books and videotapes on specific issues in teaching. The Handbook for Teaching Assistants is designed for both beginning and experienced teachers; you will find it helpful to go back to it after you have seen the sorts of problems that arise in class. In addition, many departments offer lectures and workshops on teaching, often in cooperation with the CFT.
- **Learn about learning.** Think about how your students will learn as well as what they'll learn. Teaching is more than just giving information, it is motivating people, giving them new concepts and approaches, and helping them to learn more effectively. Observe yourself and others as learners. The CFT has videotapes and articles on student learning.
- **Keep track of what you've done.** Experience is a good ally. If you keep organized records of your work for courses you teach, you can use them as a springboard for next time. You'll get more efficient, you'll have a better sense of what worked and what didn't, and you'll have more time to prepare new materials. Analyze your tests to see what questions elicited good answers and which were confusing. Record which assignments made students think, which ones made excessive work for you at grading time, and which ones improved the quality of your teaching.