

Joe Vella has taught 'AutoCad', 'Industrial Design' and 'Geometric Dimension Tolerance' to 1st and 2nd year university engineering students for four years at Swinburne.

Teaching for the first time

Even though I have been teaching for a fair amount of time, I still remember the first semester, in fact the first class I taught. Semester 1, Week 1 – and walking into the classroom, I was very nervous and doubting my ability to conduct the session. Five minutes after my well-rehearsed intro (that I changed anyway), I quickly realized that the students were experiencing exactly the same feelings. They were uncertain of what to expect in terms of teaching and learning styles, and the level of assessment.

Despite this, I jumped straight into it, and it turned out to be quite successful - the students were receptive and open to the material I presented. Having handouts and course information was also a good buffer for me as the students were quite focused on that information and it gave me time to gather my thoughts. Once the administrative tasks of the class were out of the way, I was able to get the students working with the software and producing results on-screen. The time flew past and before I knew it, the students had all disappeared and my daunting first class was over.

Preparation

One of the most important aspects of teaching to remember is that it is lifelong learning experience. It doesn't matter how many years you have been teaching ideas and concepts to students – each one learns differently and can provide you with a new perspective on your previously acquired 'old understanding'.

As sessional teachers often instruct classes with varied demographics, it is important to cater for different learning styles. More often than not, students will see the same question/problem from different perspectives. Recognizing this is integral for success as a teacher – subject material preparation should include devising alternative ways of delivering the problem/question.

Since the subjects I have been teaching primarily use AutoCad software – my classes are very much “hands-on” teaching sessions. In order to maximize the benefits both the students and myself can gain from my classes, I prepare beforehand by going through the tutorial questions myself. This way, I can analyze potential queries or difficulties that may arise during the class.

Rewards

What makes this job consistently enjoyable for me is the reward of seeing students come to a new understanding of the concepts and ideas I am teaching them. Moreover, when they can apply the skills and techniques I have taught them to solve problems and reach solutions on their own, I have a great sense of satisfaction in the knowledge that I have helped them to acquire an enlightened perspective on the subject material. Teaching is undoubtedly a very rewarding occupation. Furthermore, sessional teaching gives you the opportunity to develop the knowledge base of tomorrow's society – today, and to be a part of this process is truly worthwhile at all levels of teaching.