

# **2019 Syllabus Part 2**

## **ACTIVE LEARNING (AL)**

### **v3 (Feb 4)**

*The contents of this document are valid for all classes I am teaching Spring 2019*

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Last updated:

Monday, February 4, 2019

- Version 2: Tweaked my definition of "critical"
- Version 3: Added section 3

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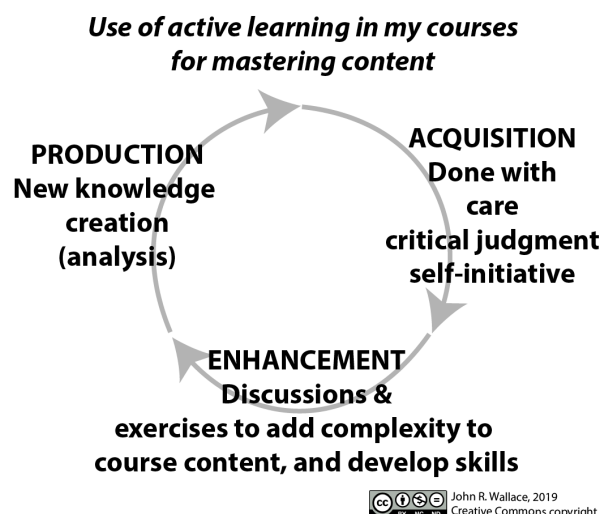
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Everyone is expected to read with care "The basics" of this document. The remaining sections are as you wish.

## 1. The basics (read this)

It might be the case that you find my "active learning" teaching style not exactly what you expected. My AL approach goes beyond small group discussions and exercises that work with assigned material. This page is meant to help you understand my teaching approach, whether you are considering enrolling in one of my classes or already are in one of my classes. Understanding my approach gives you information towards whether or not to enroll in my class, or, if enrolled, navigate successfully the assignments and other expectations. The "footprint" of my class is larger than usual due to this approach and that may or may not work well with the rest of your schedule. Also, engagement is expected in a wide variety of ways and this, too, may not be what you seek.

Some of the learning objectives in my courses concern the mastering of knowledge delivered through lecture, assigned reading, or encountered in discussion. Other learning objectives concern the development of skills. In both cases, "active learning" in my courses reaches across three phases of the learning process: how you **acquire** knowledge, **working with** course content to acquire or improve skills or bring texture and nuance to content, and the **production** of new knowledge\* through analysis (which is not the same as responding to questions on exercises, quizzes or tests).



### THREE FACETS OF AL IN MY COURSES

\*"New knowledge" means, in this case, your *carefully considered and critically solid analysis* (=observations, interpretations, tentative conclusions) of an object that is the result of sophisticated research and disciplined course method and hopefully will stand as credible, interesting, and useful to others.

**Employing self-initiative and critical judgment in KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION.** You will be expected to take, on multiple fronts, an active posture towards obtaining and understanding content. This includes:

- Careful pre-session preparation. This often means reading in a critical,\* inquisitive, and careful way, not skimming, assigned material. (Casual reading practices are one of the main

reasons for low scores on my assessments.) Additionally, when navigating the web, be aware of the level of credibility of your sources.

\*"Critical" does not mean necessarily negative reading postures; rather, it is the exercise of thoughtful evaluation. See KTC "Analysis."

- Dynamic engagement beyond the "letter" of the assignment; that is, don't hope for or request minimum assignment guidelines nor aim for them. Pathways to complex understanding sometimes do not have clear maps that can be followed. Zeami, the Noh playwright, wrote, for example, in a training manual for his actors: "When you keep it hidden, it will flower" (*hi sureba hana nari*). This is a very high level of acting advice. While I hopefully am never that cryptic, your self-initiated discovery of knowledge based on suggested rather than spelled-out processes is a common part of my active learning technique. I expect all students to problem-solve or ask along the way, when things are not clear. If something is missing, ask me rather than feel lucky that it has not been uploaded yet or whatever.
- Learn what seems to be good to learn, not what I tell you to learn. When you don't know something, look it up. The best students acquire knowledge beyond what I have specifically outlined or stated.

**ENRICHING UNDERSTANDING and ACQUIRING SKILLS through experimentation, discussion, and practice.** I view active engagement in discussions and exercises as key to the learning process. While some discussions and exercises are simply provided as an opportunity for you to understand and develop a skill and you will not be assessed on that ability until a later time, most discussions and exercises are meant to expose you to the complexities of the topic. You will frequently explore concepts through exercises, often in ways that include peer-to-peer teaching/learning and often in small group formations.

- I assess both your speaking and listening activity. It is not unusual for me to expect you to cite the comments of others in tests and essays.
- Note-taking during class and the consolidation of notes is important. I do not treat what someone says as optional course content. All discussion is course content and might be later assessed or required to be used in some way.
- Nearly all exercises cannot be done unless there is good preparation and so, when students do not prepare, it is a liability to the entire learning environment. For this reason, while I feel it is an individual decision as to whether a student wishes to learn or not, preparation in fact is a community activity which includes a responsibility towards others in the classroom. This is my attitude and it really matters to me. Please know it ahead of time.
- Most of my learning activities and grading rubrics are process-oriented, not product-oriented. Getting quickly to the product, by whatever means, generally scores low. Process-rich discussion and the completion of exercises score high. Active learning in this case is "learning by exploring" and "learning by doing." I believe the speed and productivity are skills you need to succeed. But I do not teach these skills. I teach instead the development of

texture and nuance of concepts through thoughtful processes that take some time to complete.

- I value "emergent" knowledge; that is, knowledge about a topic that is not exactly what you said, not exactly what others in the group said, but rather the total effect of the interaction of these various elements. Learning objectives include acquiring as least some of this emergent knowledge as it happens. Again, notes during class, or the consolidation of them after class, help in this.

**PRODUCING (constructing) NEW KNOWLEDGE.** In addition to quizzes and tests on course information and concepts which rely on passive memorization and repetition of content, you will be assessed regularly on your active, self-generated ability to produce credible, interesting, and hopefully useful interpretations (analysis) that extend from course content.

- As the class progresses the assessments having to do with your ability to produce analysis become increasingly important to the final course grade. Some students understand the significance of the course content and the methods expected by me early, others later. In most cases it does not matter until the end-of-term assignments such as the essay or final exam. It is a "finish line" approach: you just need to get it all figured out before those final assessments. But your ability will be assessed and it will matter. The sooner you can understand, the better positioned you are.
- Analysis will be your combination of understanding the *significance* of the material you are working with and developing observations, interpretations and/or tentative conclusions via a specified method. My classes do have a "learn and repeat for an exam" component for the basic information and concepts. However, to earn an "A" grade band in the course, you will need to show that you can work accurately and meaningfully with that information and those concepts. A passing grade requires that at least you have made sufficient effort in this direction.

Some things derive from the above that have a very real impact on your study time budget. There are a large number of assignments and deadlines to complete and manage; reading comprehension is key including understanding and following complex instructions; group activities are common and group grades are an occasional feature; since this is a "flipped"\* classroom, the "footprint" outside the classroom on your time budget is significant and constant; it can be difficult to calculate your course grade; and, there are substantial penalties for missing classes because engagement is central, and quizzes frequent. Because of the complex nature of my assessments, none can be made up, so missed classes also mean missed quizzes and such.

\*Flipped means that content is delivered outside of class session time slots, and working with content happens during class sessions. The traditional method is the introduction of knowledge in session via lecture, with "homework" to work with the material outside of class. When knowledge delivery is outside the class, the "footprint" of the class on a student's schedule is often larger and definitely is in the case of my classes since assigned material is usually quizzed at the beginning of the session.

## **2. Expectation of time investment**

The University has defined how many hours per week a student is expected to work per credit unit.

The value of a course in units shall be reckoned at the rate of one unit for three hours' work per week per term on the part of a student, or the equivalent.' COCI defines 'work' to include class contact time as well as time spent outside of class studying and doing research or homework. Thus, a three-unit course offered during fall or spring requires a minimum of nine hours of total work per week. (COCI Handbook).

This means that a student enrolled in this 4-credit course, after spending 3 hours in the regular sessions and 1 hour in discussion section per week can be expected to devote 8 hours of time outside the classroom for work related to the course. I assign reading as well as other materials and exercises with this time budget in mind, and with an assumption that the student can read onscreen at 200 words per minute.

If your preparation time is exceeding this, please contact me.

I also grade with considerable attention as to whether the submission gives the impression of being rushed or not. Take time with your work and submit a final product that communicates to me the time you put into it.

## **3. "Process valued more than product & knowledge privileged before scoring"**

In many cases, "active" learning means engaging in a process rather than achieving a final product. While of course excellent term essays or products that are the result of complex collaborative work are part of my courses, much of our work is learning through processes. This is why attendance is important, exercises cannot be made up (when they have involved group discussion), and engagement during the process is assessed (so, for example, stepping out of the room during group work is a grade negative).

Further, my classes are not chunked but rather look towards an overall, fluid mastery of the material. This means that it runs counter to the principles of the class, and is likely to generate unwanted grade results, when student focus on quizzes and tests by waiting to learn until such an assessment arrives and forgetting the material again once the assessment is over. Much of the knowledge in my classes is expected to have an active role in analysis. So it is difficult to complete (with a good score) my courses by intermittent attention designed around assessment dates.

## 4. Consider finding a different course if the below describes your work plan for this course

My AL teaching style is not appropriate for some students for a specific semester of that student, or perhaps not at all. In brief, you should consider not taking this course ...

- if your expectation is that course content is primarily for me to deliver information to you and then test you on that content; that is, the basic lecture-exam format; or
- if you are uncomfortable in scenarios where your opinions, submitted via written assignments, are projected and discussed by others and identified as your opinions (peer-to-peer learning); or
- if you aren't ready to devote time to preparing for every class session; or
- if you expect to miss class frequently; or
- if you tend to submit assignments late; or
- if you plan to skim or skip reading assignments.

## 5. Details on the repercussions of my AL approach

My AL approach affects how the class is run in many ways:

- For management readings at my end, I do not accept late work or makeup work.
- Because many of my assignments have "honors system" component, **academic integrity is very important to me.**
- I approach you as an adult. Do what is reasonable regardless of whether I spelled out the specifics or not.
- The majority of "information" is delivered outside the classroom, as online lectures, reading assignments, and such. It will not be delivered in class although portions of it will be discussed. Relying just on these in-class portions will not be enough to pass the course. This learning, thinking and other ways of preparing for class is key to the course and will be regularly quizzed. **Expect to spend time outside of class if your intention is to score well.** Even Pass / No Pass students will need to devote more time than they probably expected to in order to pass the class.
- Since I believe the learning process includes in-class activities, **missing class(es) has a substantial negative effect on your grade.**

- Because exercises can be complicated and setup can take time, and because exercises take the full session, **late arrival and early departure have a seriously negative impact on your grade.**
- Although I rarely change test dates, just about anything else in the class can change as I try new exercises or decide that for a certain group the plan of teaching is not suiting the class as well as some other approach. Expect to be flexible in the types of assignments, their frequency, when, where, and what type of feedback, how exercises fit into the larger picture of the final course grade, and, sometimes, changes in the original grade-weighting of the class.
- This approach generates a large amount of assignments. Expect assignments, perhaps even more than one, for every class session.
- This approach generates a lot of grading for me. Expect that grading might take a long time and that some exercises might go ungraded or that feedback will be limited. This is especially true towards the end of the term.
- This is not an "add up the points, know where you stand in terms of your grade" type of approach. **bCourse will not be helpful in indicating your possible course grade.**
- **You cannot predict your grade by looking at "big data" about grades I have reported in the past versions of this course.** Each class is unique. You cannot know specifics with confidence about this class via discussions with friends who have taken it before. Again, each class is unique.
- **Academic honesty** is expected and carefully monitored.
- There is a **considerable amount of group work**, and sometimes group grades.
- **My classes have far more than the usual volume of instructions** that need to be read with care. Many of my exercises are intentionally not intuitive or similar to work students have done in the past. Those who have the patience to read and follow instructions position themselves well in terms of score, learning, and just about everything else. Instructions are closer to another teaching element of the course, not just directions, and are treated as material to be learned, just list other aspects of the course.