

Using Supplement Materials for the Course

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I clearly remember my first class. It was only 4 months earlier that I graduated and left a student desk of my alma-mater. In the seminar there was a group of about 25 bachelor degree students waiting for their first university seminar. In some sense, it was the first time for them and also for me. As I realized at the moment of entering the classroom, in spite of my trembling and enormous stress, that I had an advantage: most of these first-year students had no idea what to expect from the teacher. As I found out later, they knew it exactly.

In this paper I would like to share my experiences with preparing the content of the seminars from the beginning of my teaching career till now, even though I am teaching only my sixth semester now and I may be considered as freshman. I teach subjects such as Introduction to Economics, International Economics, Statistics, Econometrics and Microeconomics.

I had the problem well-known to first-time teachers, how to provide a useful and interesting seminar with motivating content for students while best using my time for research and other university duties. In other words, how to prepare a seminar maximizing the benefit of the students from the seminar and at the same time spending reasonable time for the preparation? I discovered one way to deal with this challenge and I would like to share it with other young university teachers.

Not a right way

As a first-time university teacher I teach seminars accompanying lectures of the experienced professors. Since there was no recommended textbook for the course we taught, we had to collect a reader which consisted of self-prepared lectures and some chapters from different textbooks. I had prepared my first seminar, which took one and half hour, for more than two

weeks. I had collected abundance of materials to the related topic consisting of lectures of outstanding professors, different types of tests and quizzes, even crosswords. The only problem was that those materials were inconsistent with the terminology of the lectures and I had to adjust them. The next not very suitable thing was that I had different kinds of materials for each seminar and my students were confused about that. It was difficult for them to follow the seminars and the homework each time different. Since I put in a lot of hard work to prepare my seminars I felt that that was not the right way to teach the seminars.

Using textbooks

The next semester we changed the system: we used a regular textbook for the lectures and the seminars. My seminars gained stable structure following the textbook; there were no more terminology inconsistencies. The students knew what to expect from the seminars and I spent only a half of the time preparing my seminar. The majority of textbooks contain at least a list of the further reading recommended by the author of the book. One can use that to locate papers, books, or chapters on the subject as complementary materials. There are also case studies related to the topic. It is a very favored part of the seminars because students often require examples from practice. It is somehow difficult to provide such an example because of the restrictions of the theory taught on the elementary course. For me as teacher it is difficult to find an appropriate practice example. I had discussed the end of chapter problems with the students; I modified the problems and used them for assigning homework.

It was definitely a right move forward using a recommended textbook because I think that for bachelor students, particularly first-year students, is very important to have a stable methodology and terminology, to provide them the additional exercises and sources of literature for self-studying. Maybe the situation is different in a master degree seminar where students know the principles and they are able to discuss the topic in wider dimensions.

Using supplement materials

During the third semester teaching the same subject we have continued to use a textbook. It is a well known book used worldwide, different than the one used last semester. Beside the advantages of this book such as updated case studies, the end of chapter exercises and problems, list of the further reading; some publishing houses or corporations provide the supplement materials accompanying their textbooks. Although there are available only a few textbooks with these materials, usually they are the best or most abundantly used textbooks in a given field.

Here I list some names of the publishers which publish such books together with their web pages. I use economics books but besides this field these publishers provide books and supplement materials also in the field of political science, mathematics, psychology, medicine, and others.

Addison Wesley - www.aw-bc.com

W. W. Norton and Company - www.wwnorton.com

Wiley and Sons - eu.wiley.com

These supplement materials are usually provided freely, the only required condition is the registration of the teacher. After obtaining a password one can get on-line access to the supplement materials appropriate to the textbook used. The supplement materials consist of the instructor manual with the solutions of the end of chapter problems, pre-prepared PowerPoint presentations or graphs (if needed) and also a test bank. Every one of these parts of the materials is useful and time saving. The test bank contains the additional multiple choice questions, true-false questions, essay questions and numerical or graphic problems. There are several times more questions and problems as in the textbook and teacher can use them for assigning homework, solve or discuss them during the seminars, or use them on the midterm or final exam.

Browsing that content of the publisher of the used book I have discovered a useful source of supplement materials for my seminars. There is freely available a test generating program. It only requires the installation of a computer program and the download of the “testbank library” for the textbook. After doing that, the teacher is able to generate the tests within several minutes in any file format. Another way how to use this program is to construct the html practice exam. I use these tests interactively on my seminars and the students enjoy them because they provide a more attractive fashion of testing them.

The publishers also provide a support for the students. It means they can find there interactive learning and testing of their knowledge, tools for making an useful helps as file cards with keywords and even the crosswords. My students like to use this option of self study and preparing for the lectures and the seminars.

Conclusion

Since our faculty and curriculum are relatively young, only four years old, we are still looking for the appropriate way how to teach our students, what suits them the best. It is sometimes time-consuming; sometimes we evaluate our method as not convenient. Developing a good system of teaching students supposes a cooperation of young teacher and professor who provides the lectures. For all that problems I mentioned here I feel that we made progress and the end-of-course student feed-backs confirm my assumption.

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