13 | Useful Resources

VIU Services for Students and Faculty
(During Office Hours)
Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Learning  https://ciel.viu.ca  Email: learnsupport@viu.ca,
Phone: 250 740 6179

Counselling Services 250-740-6416 local 6416  https://services.viu.ca/counselling/

Disability Services 250-740-6446 local 6446  https://services.viu.ca/disability-services

Early Alert System  https://records.viu.ca/reg/htbin/academic_alert

Faculty Resources Page  https://www.viu.ca/employees

Health and Safety Services 250-740-6283 local 6283  http://sites.viu.ca/healthandsafety/

Human Resources 250-740-6284 local 6284  https://www2.viu.ca/humanresources/index.asp

Human Rights Advisor 250-740-6430 local 6430  https://www2.viu.ca/humanrights/

Services for Aboriginal Students 250-740-6510 local 6510
   https://aboriginal.viu.ca/services-aboriginal-students

Services for International and Exchange Students 250-740-6315 local 6315
   https://international.viu.ca/international-student-services

Student Services Coordinator 250-740-6411 local 6411  https://pr.viu.ca/studentservices/

VIU Students’ Union (ombudsman) 250-754-8866

Western Student Housing 250-754-6338 (24 hr number)
**Books and Articles about Teaching and Learning**

The following books are excellent references for completing the Teaching and Learning section of the Program Review. Many of these are books that are available for signing out from the Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Learning (5th Floor, Nanaimo Campus Library).


Tips for Sessional and New Instructors: A letter from an experienced faculty member

Dear New Faculty Member:

As someone who came to VIU with some teaching experience, but who had to learn much about VIU, its students, and its programs, I am writing to share some ideas about how you can become successful in your first semester teaching. Below is a growing checklist of things new faculty need to pay attention to—especially those who are hired at the last minute due to unavoidable circumstances such as the illness of a faculty member who was already scheduled to teach. Understanding these things, and asking the right questions will help you be successful in the classroom, and will help students learn more effectively. Getting as prepared as you can, no matter how close to the semester you are hired, will provide a better experience for both you and the students in the first semesters of your teaching career at VIU.

1. **Questions you should ask:**

   **About the department:**
   - Who are the people who work in the department? Can you connect me with them?
   - What are the core courses, and how does my course relate to them?
   - What sources of information and networking opportunities already exist within the department that I can take advantage of to learn more?
   - What is the student body like? Who are the students, and what do they respond to best?

   **About deadlines and official protocol:**
   - What are the important dates in the term that I need to take into account? (reading break, holidays, when grades are due, etc.)
   - What is the process used for posting final grades?
   - What do I need to know about other deadlines and protocols in this department?

   **About your course:**
   - What are the pre-requisites for the course I am going to teach? What have the students already learned in that course? How was it taught (teaching strategies, testing/evaluation)?
   - What is/are the course or courses into which students will go after my course? What will be expected of them there? What do they need to know and be able to do to be successful in that next course?
   - What perspectives, knowledge or key theories are required in the curriculum?
   - Are there required course objectives and learning outcomes for this course?
   - Are there previous syllabi and textbooks that I can look at?
   - What are the grading criteria and marking standards within the department so that I can maintain consistency within the department and between instructors?
   - May I see examples of A or C papers, descriptions/rubrics for such papers?
   - What challenges have faculty successfully overcome in this course?
About the students:
- Who are the students? Are they primarily traditional or non-traditional age? First generation? Aboriginal? International? Canadian? What do I need to know about your student population to teach them well?
- What are the student services available (disabilities, counseling, other supports)?

About your success:
- How will I be evaluated?
- What is considered a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ evaluation?
- What are the resources available to me to improve and document my teaching?
- If I have a question or a problem, to whom can I turn in the department? Outside the department?

2. Ideas you might put on the Course Outline
   a) Define how students can reach you and the expected response time. For instance, if they email you at midnight on Saturday, they might not hear from you until Monday morning. When students know what to expect, they are less frustrated when waiting for answers from you.

   b) Provide your phone number for situations of emergency (you might allow students to text in these situations, but also provide some boundaries i.e. If they text on a Friday night you may not respond until Saturday.)

   c) Provide information about when assignments will be returned: i.e., if it is an assignment all students hand in, there is a two week turn around. If it is presentation done by a few students in class, it will be marked by the following week.

   d) Whenever possible, create office hours that accommodate most students’ schedules and provide clear guidelines on what is important to discuss during office hours. If students do not like something in the class, suggest they can come to your office or put a note in a suggestion box.

3. When taking over for someone on sick leave, acknowledge this transition, especially in programs with cohorts of students. To ease these transitions, discuss with the students what was really working for them in regards to the last instructor and what they need to help them succeed. Regardless of the reason for your new teaching position, getting student input is a useful exercise to start the class as it provides an opportunity for the instructor to get to know the students and understand their different learning styles.
4. **Set expectations.** The first class might be used to provide an opportunity for students to create a contract for their grades (research has shown that when people are actively involved in the outcome there are often higher success rates). Doing so also provides the opportunity for the instructor to learn about each student. For instance, for some students this might be an elective and they don’t care too much about their mark while for others the mark might be very important. This process can show how a student plans to attain a good mark. It is also your opportunity to explain your own expectations (i.e. if there is a participation mark, what does this mean for the student? Just coming to class, taking an active role, completing an in-class assignment? If the course requires a paper, what does an A paper look like? What does a C paper look like?)
   - Great Writing Resource: [https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/)

5. Students need to clearly understand all assignments, including **interim and final deadlines**, grading criteria etc. If you use a grading contract, grading criteria guidelines and deadlines can be worked into the contract. Students also need a sense for what it will take to complete an assignment. For instance, if a video or class presentation is part of the course how much lead time is needed to start this process? How are groups going to be formed? What do you expect individuals to do in the group project? What does a successful group presentation look like?

6. Provide a **hand-out of topics for group presentations** you assign, each of which are linked to class lecture topics. This way presentations are coherently linked to essential course content.

7. Organize lectures to **weave in learning outcomes** throughout the course, and at the end of the class (or several times during the semester) ask the students what learning outcomes they think have been addressed. This may show you where students are or are not understanding your course structure, and may show them that the course has been carefully designed. Key learning can also be evaluated at the beginning and end of the class, so that both you and the students can see how far they have come.

8. Clearly **articulate how assignments need to be handed in.** Will they hand it in on paper? Use the Assignments function in VIULearn? I recommend they do not email you assignments: the VIULearn Assignments folder keeps student work in one place where you know that you can always find it.

9. When working with new students **ensure there is an assignment due within the first two to three weeks of class** to gain an understanding of the various abilities of the students and provide an opportunity for students to get feedback and learn about you as an instructor.
Providing an opportunity to use VIULearn assignments folder also ensures that all students are comfortable using this system.

10. **Collect feedback from students**: this is an important part of any course. Working in some sort of student feedback mid-way through the course allows students the opportunity to voice concerns and you to adapt the process before the end of the course. A suggestion box in the class also provides the opportunity for on-going feedback.

**Welcome and I wish you best of luck and joy in your new position!**