CHAPTER 4 : TEN TIPS FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHING

1. Know and love your subject
Keep up to date in your field, actively engage in research, and ensure your teaching shows your passion for your subject. Students can learn much from textbooks and other resources, but you can share with them your enthusiasm for the discipline and your industry experience.

2. Focus on student learning – always
Make sure you explain the learning outcomes to your students, why they need to achieve the learning outcomes, and how they will be assessed. Students usually respond positively when they understand what is required of them, and why. Remind students that what really matters is their learning, and that your role is to help them achieve the learning outcomes. For more information on creating good learning outcomes, see Chapter 5, Course and Unit Design.

3. Do less telling and engage students in student-centred active learning
Engaged students are more likely to participate and take an active role in their learning. Resist the temptation to tell students everything – instead, involve students in collaborative, authentic tasks such as working on scenarios and case studies. As new graduates they will need to “know their stuff”, but they will also need social intelligence – for instance, how to work in teams, negotiate and solve problems; such things are rarely learnt from textbooks. For more information on how to engage students, see Chapter 6, Engaging Learners at Curtin.

4. Assess the learning outcomes – nothing more and nothing less!
Assessment tasks are opportunities for students to demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes (which should focus on higher-order thinking skills, not memorisation). Assessments are not punishments or traps to catch students out, or ways to “keep them working”. If you use group assessment, make sure it is justified (lightening your marking load is not an acceptable justification), and ensure that students have a chance to perform as individuals. For more information on creating appropriate assessment tasks, see Chapter 9, Assessment at Curtin.

5. Give effective feedback that stimulates deeper learning
We all learn better when we feel encouraged. When you mark students’ work, return it as soon as you can and give students rich directions for improvement in a variety of formats. For more information on techniques for giving constructive feedback, see Providing Feedback on Assessment to Promote Learning in Chapter 9.
6 Interact positively
Ensure your interaction with students is constructive, positive and in keeping with Curtin’s Guiding Ethical Principles. Ensure you make time to be available to your students – advertise those times, and make sure you are available and contactable. Curtin has a number of helpful policies to guide staff – see Chapter 13, Staff Obligations: Where to Find Policies.

7 Be organised
Students must have clear, well-organised unit outlines indicating what will occur, when and why. Expect students to be punctual, and be punctual yourself, giving plenty of notice if classes need to be cancelled. For more information on how to prepare a unit outline, see Chapter 5, Course and Unit Design.

8 Communicate your passion for your subject and be an inspiration!
You probably teach in a university because you have expert knowledge in a subject you love. Not all students will share your level of enthusiasm; some will love this subject, others will not. Even so, engage unwilling students by being enthusiastic and explaining how their learning might apply to some aspect of their lives. Reflect on what it was, and is, that inspires you to pursue your learning in your subject, and try to model that for your students.

9 Evaluate your teaching and act on student feedback
During the semester, regularly ask students what is helping their learning, and what is not. Respond to all feedback by telling your students about the changes you intend to implement, and why. Formal student feedback (through eVALUate) is valuable in helping you improve your teaching skills. For more information on eVALUate, see Chapter 11, Student Feedback on Teaching and Learning at Curtin.

10 Get a peer mentor and keep a professional portfolio
Consider inviting a colleague to act as a critical friend to comment on or review your teaching and provide supportive feedback. See the section on Peer Review of Teaching in Chapter 12. Keep a teaching portfolio – a collection of peer and student feedback, as well as your own reflections on what worked and what didn’t.

Two books – quick and easy to read with practical tips: