

More than Just the Last Day of Class

Near the end of the semester, as I was reading posts to a listserv about college teaching, a faculty member asked for suggestions on structuring her last day of class. She was seeking ways to honor her students' hard work over the course of the semester as well as to celebrate her students' learning accomplishments. The first suggestion she received was simply one word: pizza.

I am sure the faculty member was disappointed with this response. She recognized that the last day of class should be more than just the last day of class. At the same time, however, she sensed that simply celebrating would forego an important opportunity to pull everything together and send students forward inspired and equipped by their semester-long learning experience.

To create a last day of class experience that honors and empowers students, the culminating task or activity should incorporate the following five elements:

1. **Synthesis** – students combine the major course concepts to create something new or use their understanding in a new way.
2. **Reflection** – students think about their learning experiences and outcomes over the course of the semester and explore or articulate new insights.
3. **Connection** – students make connections between the major course concepts and their own lives, other courses or disciplines and/or the world in general.
4. **Application** – students articulate specific ways they can put what they have learned during the semester into practice.
5. **Celebration** – students experience a sense of accomplishment, feelings of comradery and hope for the future.

In addition, be sure to make your last day task or activity highly interactive. Create energy and enthusiasm by encouraging students to speak honestly, build upon one another's ideas and think creatively. The experience can be intellectually challenging, but it also should be fun!

Bleicher (2011) describes a comprehensive last day of class activity that incorporates all five elements into an in-depth, interactive, last day of class course critique. Macpherson (2007) offers various 20- to 40-minute cooperative learning activities such as writing a legacy letter (p. 183) and exchanging success tips (p. 184) that can be incorporated into the last day of class. Faculty at University of California, Berkeley offer 16 even simpler last day suggestions... and it should be noted that the last one mentions pizza. 😊

These are just a few of many possibilities. I encourage you to begin thinking now about how you can structure this semester's last day of class to make it more than just the last day of class.

Resources

Bleicher, E. (2011). The last class: Critical thinking, reflection, course effectiveness, and student engagement. *Honors in Practice – Online Archive. Paper 130*. Lincoln, NE: Digital Commons@University of Nebraska – Lincoln. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1129&context=nchchip>

Center for Teaching and Learning (n.d.) The last day of class. *Center for Teaching and Learning. University of California, Berkeley*. Retrieved from <https://teaching.berkeley.edu/last-day-class>

Macpherson, A. (2007). Group activities to end a course. *Cooperative learning group activities for college courses: A guide for instructors*. Retrieved from http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/prod/groups/ohr/@pub/@ohr/documents/asset/ohr_89185.pdf

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