



# **U.S. ACADEMIC EVALUATION SYSTEM**

**Danielle Steider**

1

# OVERVIEW

FLTAs need to understand the system from different sides

- As an instructor
- As a student

## PLEASE NOTE

- This session will talk about the most frequent complaints/problems that students, professors and FLTAs have.
- However, please remember that the total number of complaints is still very small.

# Group Questions

What do you think are the 3 biggest complaints that language students have about their teachers/classes?

# TOP STUDENT COMPLAINTS

1. Grades/Evaluation
2. Grades/Evaluation
3. Grades/Evaluation

# ADDRESSING TOP STUDENT COMPLAINTS

- **Easy part to learn: (this can vary slightly)**

<b>Up to 100%</b>	<b>Very Good</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>4.0</b>
			<b>3.5</b>
<b>min 80%</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>3.0</b>
			<b>2.5</b>
<b>min 70%</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>2.0</b>
			<b>1.5</b>
<b>min 60%</b>	<b>Poor, below average</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>1.0</b>

# ADDRESSING TOP STUDENT COMPLAINTS

- Make sure your grading scale and criteria are written on the syllabus and reviewed for each assignment.

# ADDRESSING STUDENT COMPLAINTS

## Harder part to learn: Cultural differences in academic systems

- The syllabus is your contract with your students.
- In the US, students have a right to know how they will be graded.
- Students have a right to challenge grades, and they do.
- The terms *quiz*, *test*, *exam*, *project*, *participation*, etc. are all culturally variable! Make sure everything is clearly defined.



# FYI: BUT THIS VARIES

## ○ **Quiz:**

- short in length (1/4 page to no more than 1 page),
- short in time(5-15 mins),
- usually only 1 or two skills/topics,
- sometimes announced, sometimes unannounced

## ○ **Test:**

- longer in length (several pages and time(45mins-70mins),
- more than one skill and/or topic,
- US students expect these to be announced at least a week in advance and they prefer them to be scheduled at the beginning of the semester

## ○ **Exam:**

- long, 1-2 hrs,
- cumulative (testing everything up to that point), multiple skills and topics,
- ALWAYS announced and planned. Usually 1 mid-term exam and 1 final exam.

# ADDRESSING STUDENT COMPLAINTS

## **Cultural differences, cont...**

- Students expect timely return of grades and/or feedback.
- Most universities require instructors to have office hours and be available to students who need extra help or who have questions.
- US law (**FERPA**) requires grades be confidential between the student and teacher/supervisor (no ranking or sharing academic progress with others).

# FERPA AND HIPAA

- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
  - [www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html)
  - Privacy/Confidentiality exception: mandatory reporting rules
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
  - [www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/hipaa/understanding/](http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/hipaa/understanding/)

# ADDRESSING STUDENT COMPLAINTS

- **FAIRNESS**

- Tell the students how you will grade them
- Grade students the way you say you will grade them
- Grade all students the same way
  - except in extenuating circumstances, if you extend a deadline for one, you must extend the deadline for all
  - if you offer extra credit to one, you must offer it to all
  - Exceptions: Students with documented disabilities can get some special arrangement.

# ADDRESSING STUDENT COMPLAINTS

- Use your syllabus!
- Check with your teaching supervisor right away.  
You may be given:
  - A complete, day-by-day syllabus
  - A partial syllabus that you will have to complete with details
  - Only guidelines for what should be in your syllabus

# ○ Professors

## GROUP QUESTION

What do you think are the 3 biggest complaints that professors have about the FLTAs in their academic courses?

# TOP PROFESSOR COMPLAINTS, REVERSE ORDER

- Participation
- Group Work Issues
- Plagiarism



# ADDRESSING TOP PROFESSOR COMPLAINTS

## ○ Participation

- Come to class prepared (read the syllabus for assignments)
- Join in class discussions and group work
- Speak up!

## ○ Group work issues

- Group members count on each other—don't let them down and don't do more than your fair share.

# CONSEQUENCES OF PLAGIARISM

- Failing the paper/assignment
- Failing the course
- Being dismissed from the program

# AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

- Learn the rules of what constitutes plagiarism
- Err on the side of caution! (It's better to have too many citations than accidentally plagiarize.)
- Great resource: Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

## GROUP QUESTION

What do you think are the 3 biggest challenges FLTAs have adjusting to the US Academic Evaluation system?

# NOTES BEFORE CONTINUING

- Audit vs credit
  - Audit means you don't get a grade or academic credit for the class; however, as an FLTA you are required to actively participate in the course.
- It's about 50/50 for the FLTAs across the country: about 50% audit courses and 50% take them for credit (determined by each host institution).
- By about October, almost  $\frac{1}{2}$  of you will wish you had the other option no matter which one you have. (The grass is always greener on the other side. 😊)

- Remember, taking courses is a requirement of the FLTA program, so failure to actively participate in class can have serious repercussions:
  - Failure to earn your Fulbright FLTA completion certificate
  - Possible termination of your terms of award (and therefore, departure from the program)

# TOP CHALLENGES FOR FLTAS

- For those who are AUDITING classes
  - Staying motivated
- For those who are taking a class for CREDIT
  - Handling the pressure of getting a grade

# TOP CHALLENGES FOR FLTAS

- For all FLTAs
  - Participating fully in class
  - Understanding the course and professor's expectations
  - A course not being what they thought it was
  - A course being harder or easier than expected
  - Scheduling conflicts, prerequisites limiting course options



# ADDRESSING FLTA CHALLENGES

- Work with your supervisor or advisor to select the best courses for you. Or ask other graduate students in your department which courses they recommend.
- Read the syllabi for your courses and understand the requirements.
- Talk to your professors regularly to check in and confirm you're on track.
- If necessary, find out the rules about dropping a course.

# FINAL TIPS TO MINIMIZE ALL OF THESE CHALLENGES

- Maintain clear, specific, frequent communication
  - Supervisors
  - Students
  - Professors
- Keep detailed records
- Learn as much as you can about expectations
- Understand that learning the US academic system is a cross-cultural experience
- Be flexible: Be willing to acknowledge a problem and adjust as needed
- Keeping a sense of humor can greatly help!

# THANK YOU!

- Questions?