**Be Prepared to Flip Out Over Flipped Classes:**

**How Student Preparation can Improve Flipped Class Learning in US Government.**

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**Introduction:**

This paper examines student learning and success in both flipped and traditional classroom formats with an emphasis on student preparation prior to the flipped classroom experience. Flipped classroom, flip teaching, or reverse teaching is a teaching model in which the traditional lecture and homework elements of a course are flipped. Typically, Instead of lecturing during class and leaving students to figure out assignments on their own at home, flip your class and give students the opportunity for hands-on activities and meaningful learning in class. nsInsIin-class lecture is done at home while course assignments and other meaningful learning activities and conducted in the classroom.

This paper builds on our earlier research of flipped class teaching which showed little benefit from flipped class teaching compared to traditional lecture in terms of student success and satisfaction (Quackenbush and Costello 2015). The results of that study found that there was no significant difference in midterm exam, final exam, homework, and overall grades between the two modes of instruction. Additionally, students reported that they preferred traditional lecture format and found it to be more helpful than the flipped class format. However, students in the flipped classroom indicated that they did not review large portions of the at-home lecture material and were often unprepared for class. As a result, our subsequent research focuses on student preparation in an effort to improve flipped class learning.

In this study, two classes were analyzed over the spring, 2014 semester that completed identical course assignments in US Government at Valencia College. One section used a flipped classroom model while the other section used strict traditional PowerPoint lecture. In the flipped class, efforts were taken to ensure that students were prepared via meaningful assessments prior to class. Weighted quizzes were administered prior to the flipped class so that students would be more informed and prepared to learn from the flipped class activity. The results of the study show that students in the flipped class were more successful on course assignments than the traditional lecture class.

Additionally, students in both courses were given a course evaluation and self-satisfaction survey. Students in the flipped classroom gave the course better evaluation scores compared to the traditional course. Students in the flipped classroom felt like they were more engaged and preferred the flipped class format to a traditional lecture course. Overall the study supports flipped classroom instruction as an important teaching strategy when steps are taken to ensure that students are prepared for class. Unlike our earlier research that showed that flipped class teaching was no more successful than traditional lecture, this study supports the benefits of flipped class instruction. When students are prepared for class, flipped class teaching can be more important to overall student success and satisfaction than traditional lecture. Thus meaningful preparation appears to be a necessary element to flipped class instruction.

**Flipped Classrooms:**

A flipped classroom is one where students do book work and other interactive exercises in class and lecture is done at home (Bergman and Sams 2012; Baker 2000; and, Lage, Platt, and Treglia 2000). This teaching strategy requires that teachers find or create video lessons that students will complete on their own time (Ronchetti 2010). However, it then opens up class time for activities that include higher order thinking and interaction (Pink 2010).

A flipped class has several benefits. Faculty can spend more one-on-one time with students. They can identify struggling students and get them the help that they need (Rosenberg 2013). Also when lecture is done outside of the classroom it opens up more time for learning-centered activities like: group discussion, role play or project based activities, or any other hands on course work (Bergman and Sams 2012; and Berrett 2012). Additionally, students can rewind lectures to work at their own pace, master difficult concepts, and even make up for absences (Thompson 2011).

Flipped classrooms have been very popular at the high school level in recent years and have been used in a variety of disciplines (Bretzmann 2012). In 2011, Clintondale High School in Michigan actually flipped every classroom at the school. They showed positive results in terms of course success, graduation rates, and attendance. In recent years flipped teaching has extended to the collegiate level with some success as well (Pierce, 2013; and Berrett 2012). After hearing all of the hype about a flipped class model we thought it would be a great strategy to apply in our Introduction to US Government course. This is a high risk course at Valencia College due to low success and retention rates and seemed like a prime candidate for implementation and research.

A major problem with flipped class teaching is a lack of preparation on behalf of the students. When students are not prepared for class they become passive learners and flipped class active learning strategies can be rendered ineffective. Preparation has been shown to be an essential element of flipped class learning (Balan, Clark & Retall 2015). When steps are taken to ensure students are adequately prepared for flipped class active learning exercises students reported higher levels of engagement (Chung et al., 2009; Clark et al 2008) and excitement in the classroom (Letassy et al. 2008). Additionally, they were found to be more successful and performed better on final and standardized exams (Grady 2011). Thus adequate preparation appears to be an important step in flipped class teaching and learning.

**Initial Research:**

As teachers we are always trying to find new ways to reach our students and promote student learning. Our craft is one that is in constant evolution in terms of teaching strategy and assessment. One step in this process was the incorporation of a flipped teaching model in our classroom. It became apparent that such a teaching strategy could make class more interesting, increase student communication, and promote student success in our course. Thus we decided to break away from a traditional lecture format to incorporate a flipped class model in one section of Introduction to US government. After receiving approval from our institution, students were administered an “informed consent” form to conduct this type of research and our design was implemented.

Our initial research examined four Introduction to US government classes during the summer and fall terms of 2014. Both classes met only once a week and were at the same time of day, however one was on Tuesday and the other was on Thursday. In one class we implemented a traditional PowerPoint teaching strategy. Each day during class we gave a PowerPoint lecture that included multiple slides, a few short video clips, and several charts and graphs. Students were encouraged to ask questions but there was very little group discussion. In the other class we implemented a flipped classroom model. Students were asked to watch video lectures, as well as review the course PowerPoint’s and charts/graphs prior to class. During our class time we incorporated interactive group learning activities that related directly to the course material and their homework. A list and short description of the flipped class activities can be found in the appendix.

Students in both classes were given the exact types of assessments: a midterm exam, a final exam, and weekly homework assignments. The exams consisted of multiple choice questions and essays. Course assignment grades were then used for comparison to examine overall student success between the flipped and traditional teaching modes.

In addition to success in the course, we also wanted to see if students liked the course format and whether they felt it increased their classroom participation and communication. We assumed that students would prefer the flipped classroom format because it included more group activities and was more interactive. We also suspected that in a flipped classroom format students would strengthen their ability to communicate and increase their level of participation via the group activities. One perceived weakness of a traditional lecture class is that opportunities for student interaction and group communication are limited. Students in both classes were administered surveys at the end of the semester to determine their interest, communication, and participation levels in both traditional and flipped formats.

The final part of our analysis looked at student preparation and review of course material. As instructors, one of our concerns with a flipped classroom format was whether students would actually review the course material outside of class. This format puts a large portion of student learning and exposure to course materials squarely on the shoulders of the student. We wanted to know if students were actually reviewing the course material and whether they were coming to class prepared. Again we administered students a survey at the end of the semester to measure student preparation in both course formats.

The results of this limited study gave us reason to pause. Students in our flipped classroom did not find the format more helpful than students in a traditional lecture course. Almost half of them said that if they were to take the class again they would prefer to take a traditional lecture course. Many students seemed to prefer traditional lecture over a flipped classroom. When asked about participation and communication, students in the flipped classroom did not indicate either higher levels of participation or improved communication compared to the traditional lecture class. Overall, student success on course assignments and overall grades were not significantly better in the flipped class compared to the traditional lecture class on identical assignments.

Furthermore, our concerns over unprepared students were also confirmed to a certain degree. A considerable number of students in the flipped classroom came to class unprepared having not reviewed important information at home. As a result, we often found it difficult to conduct effective learning activities. More than half of the students in the flipped classroom reported having reviewed less than 60 percent of all course materials. This finding gives support to the idea that students may be missing a lot of important course content in the flipped classroom.

**Action Research Design**:

This study examines two Intro to US Government classes at Valencia College during the spring, 2014 semester. As in our previous research, one section used a flipped classroom model while the other section used strict traditional PowerPoint lecture. We used the same teaching strategies in both the traditional and flipped classes as our previous research. In the traditional class the lectures were the same as before. Once again students were encouraged to ask questions but there was very little class discussion. Meanwhile, the flipped class students were asked to watch the same video lectures, as well as review the course PowerPoint’s and charts/graphs prior to class. During our class time we incorporated interactive group learning activities that related directly to the course material and their homework. A vigorous attempt was made to keep everything as close as possible to our original study.

Students in both classes were again given identical assessments: a midterm exam, a final exam, and weekly homework assignments. Course assignment grades were then used for comparison to examine overall student success between the flipped and traditional teaching modes. Students in both classes were again given a post course survey to see if they liked the course format and whether they felt it increased their classroom participation and communication. As before we also looked at student preparation and review of course material.

The main difference in this study is that efforts were taken to ensure that students were prepared for the flipped class via meaningful assessments prior to class. To accomplish this weighted quizzes were administered prior to the flipped class so that students would be more informed and prepared to learn from the flipped class activity. Short 5 point quizzes were administered prior to the start of the flipped class. The questions were based upon the “flipped class” material that pertained to the class activity for that particular day. The scores from these quizzes comprised a small portion of the overall grade for the course. Unlike our previous research, these weighted quizzes offered students an incentive to review the flipped course material. The hope was that students would be better prepared for the flipped class activity, thus creating a more meaningful and effective learning environment.

**Results:**

The first areas for comparison between the traditional and flipped classes were course assignments and subsequent overall course success. Student grades were based on three main types of assignments: a midterm examination, a final examination, and homework. Unlike our earlier study which showed little difference, the flipped class outperformed the traditional lecture class in this study. When students were given an incentive to be prepared for the flipped activity, we found that assignment and overall course grades were considerably higher than in the traditional lecture class.

Upon initial review of the examination grades, students in the flipped class scored about 5percent higher on the midterm and almost 10 percent higher on the final examination than students in the traditional course. Homework grades were similar between the two classes with grades in the flipped class being insignificantly higher. The end result was that the overall grades for the flipped class were about 5 percent higher than the traditional class (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Comparison of Assignment Grades for both Flipped and Traditional Classes**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Assignments | Flipped Class  (N=27) | Traditional Class  (N=26) |
|  |  |  |
| Midterm Examination | 70.3% | 64.6% |
| Final Examination | 65.3% | 56.9% |
| Homework | 82.8% | 79.9% |
|  |  |  |
| Overall Grade | 79.9% | 74.8% |

It may be surprising to some that the examination and overall grades for the classes are low; however, these results are consistent with my experience at the college. As instructors we would like this to be higher and we are constantly trying to identify new teaching strategies to reach our students. Unfortunately US Government has been designated is a “high risk” course at Valencia College. High risk courses are those that have low rates of success and student retention. There are two factors in particular that contribute to this situation. First, US Government is a required course for all Valencia College Students so many students take it during their first semester in school. Second, many students who take the course do not like the subject and would not otherwise enroll in the course except for the requirement. Thus as instructors we often have students in our classes who have not yet completed the basic math, reading, and writing courses at the college. Also, because students did not self-select themselves into our classes we encounter many disinterested students sitting in our classrooms. The end result is that we must be vigilant in our efforts to identify successful teaching strategies.

Next we wanted to see if students liked the course format and whether they felt it increased their classroom participation and communication. We assessed these variables via student self-satisfaction surveys. The survey consisted of three questions to measure student interest and three questions related to student communication and participation.

The first question asked students if they found the course format more or less helpful. A large portion of students in the flipped class approximately 74 percent, indicated that they found this format more helpful. Meanwhile less than half, 46 percent, of the students in the traditional class had a similar response. We found the traditional class responses to be similar to our previous research, however, the flipped class results were rather different. In our previous study only 38 percent of flipped class students found the format more helpful, while 30 percent found it less helpful.

The second question asked students which format they would prefer if they were to take the class again. Over 70 percent of students in the flipped class preferred their format, while only 42 percent preferred a traditional lecture format to an interactive flipped class format. Again, the results for the traditional class are similar to those in our previous research. However, the results for the flipped class are rather different. Previously, only 36 percent of flipped class students preferred the flipped format and 48 percent said that they would prefer a more traditional lecture format.

Finally, students were asked if they would recommend the course to another student. A similar and very large percentage of students in both classes reported that they would recommend the course. These findings are similar to the results in our previous research (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Student Interest in Flipped vs. Traditional Lecture Format**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Flipped Class (N=27) | Traditional Class (N=26) |
| How did you find the course format? |  |  |
| 1. More helpful | 74.1% (20) | 46.2% (12) |
| 1. Less helpful | 14.8% (4) | 30.8% (8) |
| 1. Don’t know/not sure | 11.1% (3) | 23.1% (6) |
|  |  |  |
| If you were to take the class again would you prefer your format or the other? |  |  |
| 1. My format | 70.4% (19) | 42.3% (11) |
| 1. Other format | 11.1% (3) | 34.6% (9) |
| 1. Don’t know/not sure | 18.5% (5) | 23.1% (6) |
|  |  |  |
| I would recommend this course to another student. |  |  |
| 1. Strongly agree | 59.3% (16) | 53.8% (14) |
| 1. Agree | 40.7% (11) | 46.2% (12) |
| 1. Disagree | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
| 1. Strongly disagree | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |

The next two survey questions were an attempt to determine the level of student participation in class. The first question asked students if the format increased their typical level of participation. In the flipped class almost 93 percent of the students agreed or strongly agreed that the format increased their typical level of classroom participation. Meanwhile almost 31 percent of the traditional class disagreed with this statement. These results differ from our previous research where there was no statistical difference between the two classes and the results were similar to those in the traditional class.

The second question asked about student’s comfort level in terms of asking question and in class participation. The results show that over 90 percent of students reported feeling comfortable asking questions and participating in class. The responses were very similar for both flipped and traditional classroom formats in this and our earlier research.

The final question asked about a student’s ability to communicate ideas clearly and effectively. Again the results were very similar for both modes of instruction and the results did not vary significantly from our previous research (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Student Participation and Communication in Flipped vs. Traditional Lecture Format**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Flipped Class (N=27) | Traditional Class (N=26) |
| The class format has increased my typical level of classroom participation. |  |  |
| 1. Strongly agree | 33.3% (9) | 15.4% (4) |
| 1. Agree | 59.3% (16) | 53.8% (14) |
| 1. Disagree | 7.4 (2) | 30.8% (8) |
| 1. Strongly Disagree | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
|  |  |  |
| I feel comfortable asking questions and participating in class. |  |  |
| 1. Strongly agree | 51.9% (14) | 46.2% (12) |
| 1. Agree | 44.4% (12) | 46.2% (12) |
| 1. Disagree | 3.7% (1) | 7.7% (2) |
| 1. Strongly disagree | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |
|  |  |  |
| I have strengthened my ability to communicate my ideas clearly and effectively. |  |  |
| 1. Strongly agree | 22.2% (6) | 15.4% (4) |
| 1. Agree | 66.7% (18) | 65.4% (17) |
| 1. Disagree | 11.1% (3) | 19.2% (5) |
| 1. Strongly disagree | 0% (0) | 0% (0) |

As instructors we know that it is vital for students to review the class materials in our courses. Furthermore, it is helpful if students review these materials prior to our classes to facilitate the learning process. This is particularly true in the flipped classroom format. In a flipped classroom a large portion of the course material is reviewed outside of class. As teachers there is always a fear that students may not review this information and subsequently never have exposure to important vocabulary, concepts, and course information. Additionally, it is important for students to have a prior knowledge of the class material before class. This is especially true in a flipped class format where students are more active learners and are engaged in classroom learning activities. Subsequently, we wanted to see if students were reviewing the course materials and if they were coming to class prepared. Two survey question were administered at the end of the term related to these concepts.

The first question asked students what percentage of the course material they reviewed during the entire semester. The survey responses indicated that students in the flipped class reviewed a larger portion of the course materials than students in the traditional classroom. Approximately 63 percent of students in the flipped class reported having reviewed more than 80 percent of the course material. However, in the traditional classroom only 34 percent of students reported having reviewed more than 80 percent of the course material.

**Table 4: Student Review and Preparation in Flipped vs. Traditional Lecture Format**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Flipped Class (N=27) | Traditional Class (N=26) |
| What percentage of the course material did you review during the entire semester? |  |  |
| 1. 0% - 20% | 3.7% (1) | 3.8% (1) |
| 1. 20% - 40% | 3.7% (1) | 7.7% (2) |
| 1. 40% - 60% | 14.8% (4) | 15.4% (4) |
| 1. 60% - 80% | 14.8% (4) | 38.5% (10) |
| 1. 80% - 100% | 63% (17) | 34.6% (9) |
|  |  |  |
| How often did you review the material we were covering in class before the actual class? |  |  |
| 1. All the time | 40.7% (11) | 0% (0) |
| 1. Most of the time | 25.9% (7) | 19.2% (5) |
| 1. Sometimes | 29.6% (8) | 23.1% (6) |
| 1. Rarely | 3.7% (1) | 34.6% (9) |
| 1. Never | 0% (0) | 23.1% (6) |

The second question asked how often they reviewed the material before class. We found that students in the flipped classroom were generally more prepared than those in the traditional lecture classroom. In the flipped classroom 66.6 percent of students reported having reviewed material prior to class either all or most of the time. In the traditional classroom this was only 19.2 percent of students. Furthermore, 18.2 percent of students in the traditional lecture class said that they never reviewed the materials prior to class (see Table 4).

Finally, it is worth comparing the results of this study to those of our earlier research to see if administering a pre-quiz prior to the flipped class activity made a difference in student preparation. In our initial research only 21.4 percent of students reported having reviewed over 80% of the course material without a preparation quiz. This percentage was three times higher when students when the preparation quizzes were administered. Also, only 37.1 percent of students in the flipped class reviewed material all or most of the time before class when they did not have to take a pre-quiz. This percentage jumped to 66.6 percent in the flipped class when the pre-quiz was administered. In the traditional class, the results from this and our previous research both show that students did not review large portions of the overall course material and the material for individual classes (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Student Review and Preparation in Flipped vs. Traditional Lecture Format without Preparation Quiz**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Flipped Class (N=42) | Traditional Class (N=44) |
| What percentage of the course material did you review during the entire semester? |  |  |
| 1. 0% - 20% | 9.5% (4) | 0% (0) |
| 1. 20% - 40% | 11.9% (5) | 2.3% (1) |
| 1. 40% - 60% | 31% (13) | 25% (11) |
| 1. 60% - 80% | 26.2% (11) | 40.9% (18) |
| 1. 80% - 100% | 21.4% (9) | 31.8% (14) |
|  |  |  |
| How often did you review the material we were covering in class before the actual class? |  |  |
| 1. All the time | 7.1% (3) | 0% (0) |
| 1. Most of the time | 31% (13) | 18.2% (8) |
| 1. Sometimes | 35.7% (15) | 45.5% (20) |
| 1. Rarely | 23.8% (10) | 18.2% (8) |
| 1. Never | 2.4% (1) | 18.2% (8) |

**Conclusion:**

When we first learned about the notion of a flipped classroom we were intrigued. As teachers who promote an active learning environment in the classroom flipping had a great appeal. There was excitement about a classroom where students are engaged in active learning activities and homework while lecture notes and video are reviewed at home. However, there were some reservations. If students came to class unprepared class activities might be less effective. Also, if students did not review the lecture materials at home they may not get exposure to key vocabulary, concepts, and course information.

Our initial thought was that students would prefer the flipped classroom format because traditional lecture is often perceived as boring and impersonal. We believed that the in-class group activities of the flipped classroom would promote student participation and improve communication skills. Students would find a flipped class more interesting and the mode of instruction would reach more students with diverse learning styles. In the end our assumption was that students would be more successful in a flipped classroom vs. a traditional lecture class.

Based on our initial research we were surprised. We found no statistical difference in assignment grades and overall course success between traditional and flipped classes. Furthermore many students indicated that they preferred the traditional lecture format to the flipped classroom. There were no significant differences in levels of communication or participation among the different teaching modes and large percentage of students in both classes did not review a considerable amount of the overall course work.

In an effort to understand our results we looked at preparation. For the flipped class to be successful students need to be prepared for class in order to participate and get the most from the learning experience. As a result, flipped class students in this study were administered a pre-quiz prior to the flipped class activity. The results indicate that when a quiz was administered prior to the flipped class activity, students in the flipped class reviewed more overall course material and were better prepared for class than when a quiz was not utilized. They also reviewed more course material than students in a traditional lecture class.

When prepared, students indicated that the flipped class increased their typical level of class participation than traditional class students. Also, flipped class students found the format more helpful and are more likely to take the class format again compared to traditional lecture class students. Finally, flipped class students demonstrated greater success on course assignments and had a 5 percent higher overall grade than their traditional lecture counterparts.

Unlike our earlier research that showed that flipped class teaching was no more successful than traditional lecture, this study supports the benefits of flipped class instruction. When students are prepared for class, flipped class teaching can be more important to overall student success and satisfaction than traditional lecture. Thus meaningful preparation appears to be a necessary element to flipped class instruction.

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**Appendix:**

List of Flipped Class Activities**:**

* Articles of the U.S. Constitution Exercises: The first part of this exercise was a class activity used to review the 7 articles of the U.S. Constitution. Notecards with different aspects of each of the 7 articles were taped to a beach ball and Article I- VII was written across the whiteboard. The students were randomly passed the beach ball; after catching it the students took off one notecard and placed it under the appropriate article on the whiteboard and then explained why it belongs in that article. The second part of the exercise was a group activity, in which the students applied their knowledge of the articles by finding online articles of old or current events that related (or possibly violated) the article their group was given.
* Bureaucracy Exercise: In this group exercise students collaborated on teams to answer questions in a game of Jeopardy.
* Civil Liberties Exercise: In this group exercise students collaborated on teams to answer questions in a game of Jeopardy.
* Civil Rights and Civil Liberties: Landmark Court Cases Exercise: This exercise was a jigsaw/ peer teaching activity. The students worked in groups on finding information and answering related questions on the landmark case their group was given. The students were then re-grouped in which each member taught their new group about their landmark court case.
* Electing the President Exercise: In this simulation exercise the students went through the process of how the president is elected.
* Federal Courts Exercise: In this group exercise students collaborated on teams to answer questions in a game of Jeopardy.
* Interest Groups Exercise: In this exercise the students worked together in groups to create their own interest groups.
* Mock Congress: In this simulation exercise the students went through the process of how a bill becomes a law.
* Opinion Polls Exercise: In this exercise, the students answered a series of opinion questions twice, first by using an online polling website and second, by raising their hand. The student’s results to the questions were compared to gallop/pew polls of how the general public answered similar questions. In a think- pair-share activity, the students wrote down and shared what they think influenced them to vote the way they did on the opinion questions.
* Political Ideologies Exercise: In this group exercise students were assigned a political ideology in which they worked together to write down as many details/ examples they could come up with. After a period of time each political ideology sheet rotated into each group, in which each group had to add more details/examples.
* Political Knowledge Exercise: In this exercise the students took a U.S. citizenship test to test their political knowledge. Next they watched a video on “the state of American political knowledge” followed by a group discussion of knowledge, trust, and efficacy.
* Presidency Exercise: In this group exercise students collaborated on teams to answer questions in a game of Jeopardy.
* Third Parties Exercise: In this group activity, the students were assigned different third parties in America, in which they found information on the party and answered related questions.
* Voter Turnout Exercise: This exercise was a think-pair-share activity. The students were asked their opinions on a series of questions related to voter turnout in America. Students then shared their opinions with a peer and with the class.