

REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

1. A student's life outside of class is independent of the workload for the class.

Nearly all UNO students are employed while attending college. Most are employed more than 30 hours per week.¹ In addition, many students have familial commitments such as spousal or parental duties or as dutiful children.

Lifestyle choices by a student have no impact whatsoever on the work load reasonably expected of a student who has contracted for a college education. The content of a course and the amount that a student needs to learn are independent of lifestyle choices of the student.

Of course, lifestyle choices will alter the probability of a successful academic endeavor; given that student's unique skill sets and resource base. Accordingly, in the same classroom academic success will be far more difficult to achieve for some students than for other students

UNO reasonably expects the average undergraduate student to commit an *average* of 3 hours studying for each credit hour (e.g., 12 credit hours of class plus 36 hours of studying equals a full time student). Graduate work is more rigorous (i.e., more studying); hence, a full time graduate student takes 9 credit hours per semester. Students whose academic preparation and/or skills are less than average must reasonably expect to expend more effort than the average student in the average class. Additionally, some classes (e.g., LAWS 3910) are understood by the faculty to be more challenging than the average class, and again, more than the average effort reasonably is expected.

2. College is different from high school in many ways. One way college is different than high school (and graduate work is more rigorous than undergraduate) is the amount of independent study a student must complete.

Students are expected to *read the assigned reading prior to class*, not after. College does not use the "spoon feed" method of "education" (e.g., spending class time on the students' first or only exposure to the material). Your basic understanding of the material will come from your reading of the assigned readings, not from lecture.

Lectures will seek to develop a deeper understanding of the material.

3. College students are expected to knowledgeably participate in classroom discussions.

Oral communication skills are critical to success in life and the business world. In my classroom, "I don't know." will not be accepted as an answer unless the question is one to which the student *ought not to know*² the answer. If the answer is one that the student ought to

¹ Your instructor may know what you are going through. Your instructor was employed full time during all of his sophomore, junior, and senior undergraduate years, as well as for all but one of his five years of classroom graduate study.

² The law uses three levels of knowing: **actual knowledge** (i.e., subjective knowledge), **receipt of notice** (e.g., objective knowledge), and **reason to know** (e.g., objective knowledge). Reason to know springs from experience. Generically, students will be asked questions for which, at a minimum, the student has receipt of notice.

know, but does not know, then the student shall attempt an answer rather than ceasing all exploration for an answer.

Listening is a critical management skill. Listening to a student with fractional actual knowledge search for an answer is tremendously valuable. It expands both the knowledge base of the speaker and the listener, but more so the listener. (Those who are not listening are but fools wasting their time. Ignore them.)

A student may be tempted to cease exploration because a student can experience intense embarrassment when, during class participation, a student displays ignorance³ to peers. The instructor's subjective intent is to **not** create feelings of embarrassment. Rather, the instructor's subjective intent is to explore the assigned readings so as to deepen the students' (*note the plural possessive*) understanding.

4. College level concepts can be very difficult to grasp.

First, the quantity of concepts can be large. Second, the inherent difficulty of some concepts can be great. Third, the interrelationship of concepts compounds the complexity and dramatically increases the overall difficulty.

Some students will grasp concepts A, B, & C easily, while concepts 1, 2, & 3 will be difficult for that student. Also, what is easy for one student may be hard for another.

The mastery of these difficult, numerous, complex, and interrelated concepts is a major reason college educated persons garner more respect and income.

5. Rote memorization, while extensive, is limited to the tools of analysis.

College requires a large amount of rote memorization. This is both unavoidable and desirable. However, the purpose of college memorization is very different from the purpose of grade school memorization (e.g., multiplication tables 1x1 through 12x12).

College memorization focuses upon the elements of complete analysis. Omission of an element of analysis will (most likely) result in an erroneous analytic conclusion regardless of the quality of the fractional analysis that is conducted.

If you desire some assistance with memorization, then I recommend you, at a minimum, consult the handout *Memorization Techniques*.⁴

³ Note the difference in the meanings of the words stupid and ignorant. A person who is **stupid** is not capable of learning and therefore is not capable of knowing. Stupid people are as rare as geniuses. Ignorant people are ubiquitous. An **ignorant** person is a person who does *not now have* knowledge.

While all stupid people are ignorant, the vast majority of ignorant people are not stupid. Since **bounded rationality** afflicts all humans in all contexts, it is most accurate to say that all persons always are ignorant. In common parlance, we ignore bounded rationality and use the word ignorant to refer to a lack of reasonably expected knowledge. For example, a student who has not read an assigned reading prior to class is quite likely to display ignorance when called upon for class participation. [For more on bounded rationality consult the handout on *Critical Thinking*.]

⁴ <http://cba.unomaha.edu/faculty/mohara/web/MemorizationTechniques06a.pdf>

6. Students are encouraged and expected to ask questions based on the readings, especially contemporaneously with the lecture on those readings.

A student who asks a question displays the maturity. That student displays the maturity of self-identifying ignorance and attempting to eliminate that ignorance. These are the best students.⁵

The ideal question reflects that student's basic understanding gleaned from a prior reading of the assigned readings. However, even with a prior, close reading of the readings it is not the least bit unusual for a student to be confused by the concepts and their application: hence, the need for cogent student questions.

7. During class participation, listening is the most important task.

The conversation between the professor and a student during class participation, primarily, is for the benefit of the other students so that they might practice their listening skills. The student speaker does benefit, but not as much as the listening students. The student speaker does get to practice presentation skills and thinking in a dynamic context. Students who do not listen when other students speak surely will learn little.

Both the student speaker and the other student listeners will benefit greatly if the speaker speaks using some distinctive patterns.

First, the student speaker needs to *speak clearly*. This includes volume as well as enunciation. Untrained speakers use a normal conversational volume when speaking in a large room to a large number of listeners. This prevents others, especially those seated behind the speaker, from hearing what is said. One's volume of voice often is set automatically based on visual cues. The professor will back away from a student who speaks too softly so that the student's eyes increase the volume of the student's voice.

Second, the student speaker needs to *speak unambiguously*. There are two main speech flaws we will try to eliminate: using an inappropriate *rising intonation* and using *indefinite pronouns*.

The sequence of words in the two sentences "The sky is blue." and "The sky is blue?" are the identical, but the vocalization is not. The intonation drops at the end of declarative sentence to indicate the period and the intonation rises at the end of question to indicate the question mark. Many students have the bad habit of ending all sentences with a rising intonation. The professor will respond to a rising intonation with the question "Is that a question?". Since it is a habit, most students will be startled by the professor's response. *A good manager does not give an order in the form of a question.*

In addition to rising intonations, confusion creeps into oral classroom responses when a student uses indefinite pronouns (e.g., he, she, it, they⁶). This is especially troublesome when a student uses multiple indefinite pronouns to identify multiple actors. For example, a student

⁵ Only a fool avoids "acting white" as that phrase is used in this context. Enough folks will work to hold you back without you joining in their efforts.

⁶ I will but note the transformation of the spoken English language includes near universal vernacular acceptance of the use of the indefinite third person plural (e.g., they, them) to identify a singular person of unknown or irrelevant sex. That is, "he" is no longer universally used as a default third person. The use of the plural to indicate a singular only complicates matters further for the attentive listener.

might say, "He said that he would not contract with him.". It would be far more informative if the student said, "The retailer said that the manufacturer would not contract with the wholesaler.". No one masters this speak pattern instantly, and at the end of the semester some still will slip back into the old habits when speaking swiftly.

Third, *class participation uses the Socratic Method of posing and answering questions*. However, a student may ask any question at any time and the professor will answer it.⁷ If a student needs to identify a fact prior to giving an answer, then that would be an appropriate time for a student to ask a question. However, typically, the student would be better off if the student identified predecessor facts that the student sees as driving the student's answer to the original question as well as identifying how each such fact would drive that answer. Ideally, the student would then explore whether it is more or less likely that the fact exists or not. Note, when the professor answers a student's question posed in response to the professor's question, invariably the student will get another question from the professor that is more difficult than the avoided question. Mere diversionary tactics are swiftly identified as is the genuine thirst for knowledge.

Fourth, often students *inappropriately use the words "probably" or "maybe"* in an answer. Students might be seeking to avoid clarity as a way of avoiding personal responsibility for their answer (e.g., I did not say *that*). Other times the lack of clarity springs from lack of clear thought. Still other times the lack of clarity springs from speech habits that deny the student's statements clarity. There is nothing inherently wrong with an answer that contains the words "probably" or "maybe". The professor will assume the student knows what the student is saying and will take the words "probably" and "maybe" at face value. That is, when a student says "probably" the student is indicating that the answer could be "yes" and the answer could be "no", but that the more likely answer is "yes". The professor will ask the student for the criteria that switch the answer between "yes" and "no" as well as the justification for the probabilistic statement. "Maybe" is less definite than "probably" because "maybe" does not dare to say which is more likely. The use of "maybe" in answer will prompt the professor to ask the student for the criteria that switch the answer between "yes" and "no" as well as the justification for no probabilistic statement. These questions from the professor are crafted to hone the students' (*note the plural possessive*) analytic skills and communication skills.

Fifth, *class participation is about costless error*. The only price for the student's gains in knowledge during class participation is a willingness to explore. Exploration implies getting lost on occasion. Recall that the college level concepts are numerous, complex, and interactive. For those reasons, often a student as a novice will not be able to swiftly analyze an entire situation. Costless error encourages the student to *subdivide the question* into more manageable pieces that can be analyzed one at a time. Also, if a student genuinely does not know, that student should first attempt to analyze the answer "yes" and then to attempt to analyze the answer "no" and thirdly to pick between those two options.⁸

Sixth, public speaking is stressful and tends to reduce the clarity and swiftness of thought. These physiological reactions can be reduced by *desensitization*. Desensitization to the pressures of public speaking is one purpose of class participation. The professor will attempt to track a student's eye pupil dilation, rate of respiration, and flushing of skin as objective indicators of the student's level of stress. If the professor detects stress levels that are objectively inhibiting the student's ability to respond the professor will divert attention from that student and the question

⁷ In fact, every class will start with the professor asking students "Any questions?".

⁸ It is unlikely that students will be as gifted a logician as Spock and therefore will not be able to simultaneously analyze both "yes" and "no". It would be far more fruitful to analyze one and then the other.

posed to that student until those indicators of elevated stress levels have dropped, and then the professor will return to the student. Not answering questions in class is not one of the options. See also, item #3 above.

Seventh, class participation often is a *search for existing actual knowledge in the context of fractionally recovered actual knowledge*. That is, listening to a student that does not know all of the requisite knowledge, or listening to a student that does not instantly know what the student actually knows. All too often, in these situations, a student will respond, "I do not know." when that is false statement. At a minimum, the student will have receipt of notice. Nearly always, the student has fractional actual knowledge. All too often a student will respond, "I do not know.", when the student does not have 100% instantaneous recall. It is pride that is stopping the student's search for existing actual knowledge. That is not acceptable. One of the best benefits a listener can obtain is hearing the thought patterns of a person who is fractionally recovering actual knowledge. Witnessing the connections and conclusions that flow from fractionally recovered actual knowledge allows each listener to become a better manager and to develop critical thinking skills.⁹

⁹ For more on critical thinking skills, at a minimum, consult the *Critical Thinking* handout. <http://cba.unomaha.edu/faculty/mohara/web/CriticalThinking06a.pdf>