



Dynamic Lecturing: Research-Based Strategies to Enhance Lecture Effectiveness

Harrington, Christine; Zakrajsek, Todd
Stylus Publishing, Llc., 2017

Book Review

Tags: lecture | pedagogy | student learning

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Date Reviewed: July 18, 2018

Against the prevailing tide in higher education, Christine Harrington and Todd Zakrajsek argue that lectures, when prepared well and incorporated appropriately, are one of the most effective ways to enhance learning. The first part of their book is focused on making this case and on delineating the different forms a lecture can take. The second part of the book focuses on ways to make lectures more effective for learners. That second part takes up the bulk of the book (7 of the 11 chapters). The third part provides tools and resources for preparing and evaluating lectures. These final two chapters give helpful rubrics, charts, and questionnaires that can easily be adapted for one's own lectures or for evaluating others' lectures. This book would be a useful addition to an individual professor's library and, most especially, to a center for teaching and learning library.

Both authors of *Dynamic Lecturing* are trained in psychology and have experience in teaching and learning and faculty development centers, so the examples are often from social science or natural science classrooms. However, many of their suggestions could easily be adapted to theology and religious studies. Using research from the scholarship of teaching and learning, they argue that lectures are efficient and effective for novice learners but are less so for expert learners (by which they mean advanced undergraduates and graduate students). This book, therefore, would be most useful for faculty who frequently teach lower-division courses for undergraduates; it could still be quite useful for those wanting to make their lectures more effective, even if they work with other learner populations and use other kinds of teaching tools.

This distinction between novice and expert learners is significant in the context of theology and religious studies: in certain courses, students may enter the classroom assuming they are the

experts (for example, if the course focuses on their own religious tradition, especially if the professor is not another “insider”). Harrington and Zakrajsek’s discussion of techniques like pre-testing may be a way to address this unique dynamic: if a student took a pre-test and found that they did not know as much as they thought they knew, they might find themselves more open to learning from a professor’s lecture.

As their title suggests, this is not a book about individual teaching choices, but rather is focused on research-based strategies: nearly every paragraph has multiple citations that refer the reader to studies done on teaching and learning. A bibliography accompanies each chapter, so references are easy to track down, if desired. The studies are often explained well, so the reader knows what the research suggests; there are times, however, when the conclusions seem overstated. For example, a study used to argue that lectures are more helpful than active learning sessions to novice learners is explained in a parenthetical note: 88% of students agreed or strongly agreed that a lecture helped them learn course content compared with 49% of students who agreed or strongly agreed that active learning sessions helped them learn course content (10). Self-reporting is not the same as demonstrating mastery of the content. In other places, the authors note that students are not always the best judges of their own learning (see, for example, studies on learners’ overconfidence [115]). The research cited throughout the book is not limited to self-reporting and includes very helpful data on what promotes student engagement and learning.

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