

CAT+FD FACULTY WORKSHOP

Tips & Tricks for the First Week and Beyond

Making the first week count

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20
MINUTES

Welcome & Workshop Goals

By the end of today, you'll be able to:

1

Understand the Science

Why the first week matters: grounded in research, not guesswork.

2

Discover Evidence-Based Strategies

Build belonging and curiosity into your classroom from day one.

3

Walk Away Ready

Leave with a practical toolkit of activities you can use this semester.

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Facilitated by Dr. Mark Gstohl, Associate Director, Xavier's Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Faculty Development

Your 20 Minutes at a Glance



Why the First Five Minutes Matter

The science of “thin-slice” first impressions



The Belonging Research

What decades of data say about student persistence



The Playbook: Do This, Skip That

Evidence-based moves for day one and week one



Inclusive & Design

Practical, respectful, and policy-aware from the start



Icebreakers You Can Use Tomorrow

Connection-before-content activities that work



Discussion & Takeaways

Turn-and-talk + one thing to try this week

First Impressions Happen Fast

UNDER
30 sec

is enough exposure for students to form a stable, predictive judgment of an instructor — one that correlates with end-of-semester evaluations.

Ambady & Rosenthal (1993); Vinokic et al. (2024)

System 1 takes over.

In seconds, students rely on fast, intuitive, holistic judgment not careful analysis to size up you and the course.

The halo effect is real.

Quick judgments are stable but bias-prone, and disproportionately swayed by one negative moment.

Nonverbal warmth is the channel.

Smiling, eye contact, head nods, and simply moving around the room read as competence and care.



Belonging Predicts Persistence

26,911 students · 22 institutions

A randomized controlled trial found that a brief, 30-minute social-belonging intervention before arrival significantly improved first-year persistence especially for historically underrepresented students.

The catch: the message only works if your classroom actually delivers the “belonging affordances” it promises real peer support and inclusive instruction.

Walton, Murphy, Logel, Yeager, et al. (2023), Science

118

ACADEMIC STUDIES SYNTHESIZED

More than GPA or financial aid — a synthesis of 118 academic studies finds community is a primary predictor of college completion.

Gilani & Thomas (2025), Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education

“Every classroom interaction either builds or erodes belonging.”

Recognize the Transition

New and marginalized students often carry real belonging and separation anxiety into week one. Naming it and designing around it helps.

What Students May Be Feeling

- Homesickness and social awkwardness
- Sensory or environmental overload
- Pressure that feels bigger than it is
- Worry that these feelings are unusual

These are normal, temporary responses to a major transition — not signs something is wrong.

Small Moves That Help

- Predictable structure and clear routines
- Flexible seating and low-pressure participation
- Explicitly normalizing campus support resources
- Warm, individual acknowledgment — use names

Source: Child Therapy Center of LA (2025); Dost & Smith (2023)



Stop Starting with the Syllabus

How you open day one sends a message before you say a word.

A SYLLABUS SIGNALS

“Administration matters most.”

A QUESTION SIGNALS

“Your thinking matters most.”

- 1 **Cornell CTI:** start with real content or a provocative question save the syllabus for the last 10 minutes.
- 2 **Mowreader (2024):** move basic policies to a self-graded LMS quiz use face time for rapport and community instead.

Lang's Four C's for Day One and Beyond

James M. Lang's widely used framework for a great first class session.



Curiosity

Spark interest with a deep, unresolved question — not an administrative checklist.



Community

Humanize yourself, greet students individually, and get them talking to peers.



Learning

Engage students in real cognitive work from day one, even before they feel ready.



Expectations

Model the exact style of active, collaborative interaction you want all semester.

Seven Ideas for a Strong Start

University of Iowa Center for Teaching practical moves for the first week.

1 Curate the room — music, seating, energy

2 Share your own story and identity

3 Run a reflective Write-Pair-Share

4 Dive into content with an evocative activity

5 Co-create community guidelines together

6 Try an active syllabus scavenger hunt

7 Follow up with a short LMS welcome video

Pick two or three, not all seven and try them this week.

What Award-Winning Professors Do

A qualitative study of instructors recognized for outstanding teaching found four consistent first-day themes.

1

Communicate expectations clearly

Students know exactly what the course asks of them from day one. No guessing games.

2

Learn about your students

Their backgrounds, preparedness, and what they hope to get out of the course.

3

Introduce yourself. For real

Show accessibility and share what you're genuinely passionate about teaching.

4

Establish a collaborative, trusting tone

Model interaction and protect student vulnerability from the very first minute.



“Dismissing class immediately after reading the syllabus signals that student interaction doesn't matter.”

— Iannarelli, Bardsley, & Foote (2010), *The Journal of Effective Teaching*

Watch Your Noncontent Language

Observing 23 STEM classrooms, researchers found instructors from every teaching style unintentionally sent exclusionary signals not through content, but through the asides around it.

SOUNDS EXCLUSIONARY

“Don't be the student who skips office hours.”

“If you're not a math person, this class will be rough.”

“I hope you're not the type who emails at 2 a.m.”

SOUNDS INCLUSIVE

“Office hours are for every one of you, I mean that.”

“Whatever your starting point, there's a path through this course.”

“I check email on a schedule here's when to expect a reply.”

Illustrative rephrasing, not literal study transcripts. Lane, Meaders, Shuman, Stetzer, et al. (2021), CBE—Life Sciences Education

Inclusive From the Start

Inclusive Practices

- Arrange seating to support discussion (circles, tables)
- Use a student information-I usually get the information via a quiz
- Ask for and correctly use preferred names and pronunciation
- Wait until session 2–3 to co-create ground rules

Rastovac Akbarzadeh (2017), adapted by Stanford VPTL



Icebreakers Worth Your Five Minutes

Good icebreakers are purposeful and tied directly to your course — not filler. A sample from two sources; the full menu (7 + 15 ideas) is in the bibliography.

1

Question Swap

Color-coded cards (light, reflective, deep) — students ask, answer, and trade.

2

Say Hi to a Neighbor

A tiny, repeatable nudge that builds new peer friendships fast.

3

Take the Temperature

Real-time polling turns the room's mood into a shared word cloud.

This Week: Five Quick Wins



Pick one icebreaker that connects to your course content



Save the syllabus walkthrough for the last 10 minutes



Learn — and correctly say — every student's name



Co-create one shared expectation together



Send a short, warm welcome message before day one

Reflection

**What's one thing from today
you'll try in Week One?**



Selected Sources

From “The First Five Minutes,” an 18-source annotated bibliography on first-week higher-education pedagogy (2026).

- Ambady & Rosenthal (1993). Half a Minute. J. Personality and Social Psychology.
- Vinokic, Begrich, Kunter, & Kuger (2024). Thin Slices Judgments. Frontline Learning Research.
- Dost & Smith (2023). Sense of Belonging. J. Further and Higher Education.
- Walton, Murphy, Logel, Yeager, et al. (2023). Science.
- Gilani & Thomas (2025). 118-Study Review. J. Learning Development in Higher Ed.

- Cornell CTI (2026); Mowreader (2024), Inside Higher Ed. First-Day Strategy.
- Lang (2021). How to Teach a Good First Day of Class. NIU CITL / Chronicle of Higher Ed.
- Lane, Meaders, Shuman, Stetzer, et al. (2021). CBE—Life Sciences Education.
- Rastovac Akbarzadeh (2017); Iannarelli, Bardsley, & Foote (2010). First-Day Teaching Practices.
- Littlefield (2024); McQuade & Conaway (2025). Faculty Focus / We and Me.



Full annotated bibliography with links and complete citations for all 18 sources is available through CAT+FD.