

## Pop Quizzes, the Accommodation Dilemma

### "The Accommodation Dilemma of Pop Quizzes" By Ruth J. Fink, Ph.D.

Pop quizzes can be a valuable teaching/learning tool in postsecondary education, but they often put many otherwise qualified students with learning disabilities, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, traumatic brain injury -and sometimes psychiatric disorders- at an extreme disadvantage.

These students frequently qualify for the accommodation of extended time on examinations, tests and quizzes, typically one and one-half to double time. Here is the accommodation dilemma: Five-minute pop quizzes during class then necessitate a time extension of 2 1/2 to 5 minutes more for the student with the disability, and leave the professor and the rest of the students waiting. Even more problematical, the student with the disability is clearly identified as same, calling undue attention to the disability and also putting this same student under extraordinary stress. Having the student finish the pop quiz in the professor's office is not always possible because of class schedules.

Pop quizzes are simply not "accessible" and fair to all students. There are other ways to obtain the information needed from the students, such as:

- (1) Did students read and comprehend the assignment?
- (2) Is the student keeping up with daily reading assignments?
- (3) How well are students internalizing the readings?
- (4) Do I need to reiterate salient points and provide more examples? and
- (5) Can the student apply the principles to practical application situations?

I taught classes that met once a week, in the evening, for three hours. When a class meets only 16 times during the semester, it is necessary to track student progress weekly. Here are some things I did in graduate-level, special education theory and methods classes for teacher training in the School of Education at the University of Colorado to accommodate students:

1. Put pop quiz-type questions on the course or department Web site or on a class e-mail list at a certain time, to be e-mailed back or turned in (hard copy) by the next class time;
2. Present these types of questions as a handout at the end of class to be turned in at the beginning of the next class;
3. Put all pop quiz-type questions on the syllabus reading list, following each assigned reading (this allows students' reading to be more directed); vary the response mode requirement each week to be posted on a special Web site, e-mailed to the professor, or handed in at the beginning of the next class.

4. Vary how this pop quiz-information is obtained from students so it does not become boring and mundane:

- Do an all-class pop quiz on the overhead one day. Each class member is asked/ expected to add to the discussion (best for classes with less than 15 students) and then discuss the answers with the entire class. Such a technique has proven to be a good learning experience for everyone, in that students whose cognitive abilities are different are allowed the opportunity to observe how their peers think, problem solve and internalize course elements. This also allows the professor to observe how students absorb course material and display knowledge in different ways.
- A short take-home pop quiz, due at the beginning of the next class is another option. The professor can put the question on a standard-sized sheet of paper and specify that the answer should not take up more than half the page. (All students typically ask how "long" the answer should be!)
- Occasionally the professor could assign an in-class, small-group question and have students derive the answer with one student from each group reporting the collective answer. Depending on the size of the class and the amount of material to be covered, the professor might assign each small group a different question, asking that the answers be turned in at the end of class so the professor can put them on a Web site, in an e-mail memo or put them on the word processor as a hand-out for the next class meeting. For such an exercise, the professor can allow about 15 minutes (of a three-hour class period) for their discussion and answer. Then another 15 minutes can be allowed for reporting to the class and clarifying any misunderstandings.
- The professor might ask students to devise a pop quiz-question that they think is relevant to the assigned readings and ask to have it answered (This surprises them!). And one thing that can be learned from this exercise is that some students with learning disabilities have a great deal of difficulty with this task. A professor needs to know the students fairly well before doing this so it doesn't catch certain students being required to demonstrate their weakness or disability in front of the class. It should be emphasized there are no "stupid questions!" A few times, I have been caught not knowing the answer, but this allows a simple response of "I don't know," and stating that the answer will be presented at the beginning of the next class period.
- About twice a semester, when students have demonstrated that they are keeping up with the class work and readings, or when a particularly long project is due, I have surprised them by stating that there will be no checking of their readings this particular class period, but any questions they have are invited and answered.
- If there are less than 12 students in the class I schedule a 15-20 minute one-on-one discussion with each student during the semester, during the last 15 minutes of the

three-hour class period (in addition to office hours and other appointments as requested).

- While a couple minutes of this time is spent on personal rapport and support, I always have pop quiz-type questions to discuss with them such as, "Tell me your understanding of the differences between internalizing and externalizing disorders for students in your (grade level) classroom." This allows the others to leave early and allows the professor important personal support opportunities to all students, disabled and non-disabled, and no student is singled out for any reason.

I emphasize at the beginning of the semester that much of the content of each class is not only for their learning and required by the state department of education for teacher certification, but also for the purpose of internalizing information as they write their comprehensive exams prior to the awarding of their graduate degree. I also emphasize, to this end, that the questions that are posed to them (or they pose to the professor) are to assist them in reaching this goal in a situation that causes them the least amount of stress possible, and accommodates diverse backgrounds, abilities and experiences - but in the form of no timed pop quizzes!

I am NOT advocating that students with disabilities do not need extended time on quizzes. Rather, this is a way to eliminate the need for extended time by obtaining a quick perusal of students' progress in a venue other than a timed pop quiz-situation, and certainly meets some of the tenets of Universal Design.

Student feedback has been very positive in that both students with and without disabilities have expressed appreciation for taking the "terror" out of pop quizzes. Having the opportunity to learn at their own rate and within their own learning style, while being gently pushed to keep up with the readings, were also helpful comments. One very bright student with ADHD sent an e-mail at the conclusion of the course expressing that this class was the first one he had ever completed on time! One or two students (most are active teachers) each semester realize that "modeling" inclusive teaching and testing techniques are a covert part of the class, and have indicated that they are now much more sensitive to learning differences among their own K-12 students; they have put extra thought into finding creative ways to minimize these differences for students in their own classrooms.

Finally, the various procedures assist in alleviating the "extra time" dilemma of pop quizzes.

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