

Shadow Syllabus

Sonya Huber, August 20, 2014

1. I'll tell you exactly how to get an A, but you'll have a hard time hearing me.
2. I could hardly hear my own professors when I was in college over the din and roar of my own fear.
3. Those who aim for A's don't get as many A's as those who abandon the quest for A's and seek knowledge or at least curiosity.
4. I had bookmarked a citation for that fact, and now I can't find it anywhere.
5. The only way to seek knowledge is to open your hands and let your opinions drop, but that requires even more fear.
6. The goals and outcomes I am required to put on my syllabus make me depressed; they are the illusion of controlling what cannot be controlled.
7. I end up changing everything halfway through the semester anyway because the plan on paper is never what the living class ends up being about.
8. I desperately needed A's when I was in college because I didn't know what else I was besides an A.
9. Our flaws make us human; steer toward yours. I steer toward mine. That won't always be rewarded in "the real world."
10. "The real world" isn't the real world.
11. I realize that I, as the authority figure in this room, might trigger all kinds of authority issues you have. Welcome to work and the rest of your life.
12. I have a problem with authority figures myself, but I've learned how to work with it. Watch my cues.
13. I think I have more to teach you about navigation than about commas, although I'm good at commas.
14. This is about commas, but it is also about pauses and breaths and ways to find moments of rest in the blur of life's machinery.
15. I hope we can make eye contact.
16. One of you who is filled with hate for this class right now will end up loving it by the end.
17. One of you who I believe to be unteachable and filled with hate for me will end up being my favorite.
18. One of you will drive me to distraction and there's nothing I can do about it.
19. Later I will examine the reason you drive me to distraction and be ashamed and then try to figure out my own limitations.
20. There will always be limitations, and without my students I wouldn't see them as easily.
21. Sometimes I will be annoyed, sarcastic, rushed, or sad; often this is because you are not doing the readings or are trying to bullxxx me.
22. Students are surprised by this fact: I really really really want you to learn. Like, that's my THING. Really really a lot.

23. I love teaching because it is hard.
24. Someone in this classroom will be responsible for annoying the heck out of you this semester, and it won't be me.
25. Maybe it will be me. Sometimes it is, but often it is not.
26. I won't hold it against you unless you treat me with disrespect.
27. If you are that person, you should rethink how you treat the people who bring you food at McDonald's, as well as how you treat your teachers.
28. I hope you are able to drop the pose of being a professional person and just settle for being a person.
29. Everyone sees you texting. It's awkward, every time, for everyone in the room.
30. Secret: I've texted in meetings when I shouldn't have and I regret it.
31. Secret: I get nervous before each class because I want to do well.
32. Secret: when I over-plan my lessons, less learning happens.
33. Secret: I have to plan first and THEN abandon the plan while still remembering its outline.
34. Secret: It's hard to figure out whether to be a cop or a third-grade teacher. I have to be both. I want to be Willie Wonka. That's the ticket. Unpredictable, not always nice, high standards, and sometimes candy.
35. What looks like candy can be dangerous.
36. Secret: Every single one of your professors has been at a point of crisis in their lives where they had no idea what the xxx to do.
37. Come talk to me in my office hours, but not to spin some thin line of bull, because believe it or not, I can see through it like a windowpane.
38. Some of you will lose this piece of paper because you've had other people to smooth out your papers and empty your backpack for as long as you can remember, but that all ends here. There's no one to empty your backpack. That's why college is great and scary.
39. Maybe there's never been anyone to empty your backpack. If there hasn't been, you will have a harder time feeling entitled to come talk to me or ask for help.
40. I want you, especially, to come and talk to me.
41. You can swear in my classroom.
42. Welcome. Welcome to this strange box with chairs in it. I hope you laugh and surprise yourself.