

Teaching with SSCL: What Our Instructors Say

What makes teaching for SSCL unique or rewarding?

“Those in the classes are engaged with the material. They have chosen to be there and look to make the most of it. They come from a wide background, ranging from teaching and engineering to psychiatry and accounting, and to them retirement does not mean retiring from learning. It is this drive that particularly appeals to me.”

- Clay Burlingham

“Teaching an SSCL class is essentially the Platonic ideal of teaching. In other words, it's what teaching should be. Everyone who is there is only there because they want to be. They are interested in the material. Plus, they often have lived experiences which connect to the material and want to participate. It's an amazing experience.”

- Jason Zorbas

In what ways do course content or teaching style need to be adapted for an older adult audience?

“I try to avoid the jargon, that can come with a particular field, and if I do have to use words that are particularly laden, I look to unpack them (for example, “existentialism”)

- Clay Burlingham

“I tend to use less technology and fewer pop-culture references.”

- Jason Zorbas

What is it like to teach hybrid?

“I like the hybrid classes, but one needs to remember that in teaching one, it means speaking to two worlds (those in the classroom and those at home) at the same time. That means writing on the board will not be seen by those at home, so using a white board is essential, for those not in the classroom. Questions asked in class have to be repeated for those at home, and that is not always easy to remember. In finding ways to balance questions, so that the thread of the lecture, remains forefront, usually some kind of method much be found, so that questions, which are always good, do not hijack the class. I found setting aside a set amount of time (ten minutes) prior to the break as one way to deal this.”

- Clay Burlingham

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“Hybrid teaching is a little more difficult because of the need to be aware of the camera, and therefore where you are standing. As well, it is hard to use PowerPoint, so I usually dispense with it altogether. Also, because of the online section, questions need to be asked at a specific time, instead of organically during the lecture. Having said this, these are relatively minor issues, and I don't usually have any problems with hybrid teaching.”

- Jason Zorbas

What advice would you give someone teaching with SSCL for the first time?

“I think that it is important to unpack the material in a way that interests. Those in the class want to be there. Have a topic that will intrigue, and present it in a way that will draw them in. These are people who want to think, and with that, give them something to think about. An outline of the lectures really helps, as does a short bibliography.”

- Clay Burlingham

“I would recommend that you know your audience. These are not undergraduates but rather mostly retirees who are still dedicated to learning. The strategies and teaching styles that work for an SSCL class will likely be different than an undergraduate class. Also, expect questions. Good, thoughtful questions. Finally, you will likely be challenged at some point on some of your material. Be humble and receptive to this. There's a really good chance that they're right and you're wrong.”

- Jason Zorbas

Why do you choose to teach with SSCL?

“It is nice to be able to just teach. In the classes I do for the University, there are assignments, which change the tone of the class, for people never really like being marked. Here, one can focus just on the lectures, along with the questions they generate.”

- Clay Burlingham

“Initially, I was looking for work and a colleague suggested SSCL as an option. After my first class, I was hooked! I've been teaching for the program ever since.”

- Jason Zorbas



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