



Using Humor to Create a Positive Learning Environment

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Abstract

How to enhance student learning is a critical issue in academia. Throughout the author's academic career, teaching effectiveness has always been an on-going challenge. Consequently, he has experimented with different teaching techniques and approaches. The author's experience as a teacher, industry trainer and presenter to various community and professional groups helped him to recognize that humor can enhance interest and learning in a given topic. As a result, he has been using humor to promote a positive learning environment in the courses he teaches.

In the paper the author will describe how he uses humor to create a positive classroom learning environment. The paper will identify the benefits derived from using humor as a classroom teaching technique. Also, the paper will provide ideas for technology and engineering faculty on how they can integrate humor into their courses to develop a positive learning environment.

Keywords: humor, positive learning environment, student learning, humor style, integrating.

Introduction

A never-ending challenge for most teachers, including the author, is to find ways to enhance student learning. Unfortunately, most university faculty have not had any formal training on how to competently teach. Consequently, many faculty are left on their own to figure out how to make their courses interesting and inspire student learning. Often, faculty will engage in trial and error, with some relying on the teaching techniques used by experienced colleagues or their former instructors.

To promote effective teaching and improve student interest in learning, instructors need to demonstrate expertise in their discipline and establish a positive learning environment. To be competent in the courses he teaches, the author maintains expertise in his discipline via continuous readings, updates, and research.

Providing information to students in a way that stimulates student interest and learning is a different challenge and, in the opinion of the author, a more difficult one. Instructors can enhance student interest and learning of course materials by establishing a classroom environment that encourages learning. The author has recognized that humor can help motivate students and create a climate that promotes learning^{1, 2}. "Humor sells³" and "laughter is universal⁴."

Students prefer to learn in different ways⁵. Similarly, different generations have different learning preferences. Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), Generation X (born 1965-1980) and Millennials (born 1981-2000) prefer to learn when there is the opportunity for

interactive or group learning, when learning is fun and/or when learning is “edutainment⁶.” Humor has the capability of satisfying the different generational learning preferences.

“While students may not expect or require a professor to be funny, they likely prefer professors who show that they have a sense of humor over professors who either don’t have a sense of humor or don’t show it⁷.” Consequently, the author has deliberately attempted to create a positive and interesting learning environment through the use of humor in the classroom. “Humor is an effective way to engage students and activate learning⁸.”

Define Humor

There are various ways to define humor. What is humorous is subjective and varies from person to person. Humor is “anything that is perceived to be funny, comical or amusing⁷.” “As comedian Steve Allen has observed, what is humor is a matter of personal opinion⁷.” Because humor is subjective, “there are different types of humor including, humor related to class material, funny stories, humorous comments, self-disparaging or deprecating humor, unplanned humor, jokes, riddles, puns, funny props and visual illustrations⁹.” Since what is humorous varies and different people find different things funny, every teacher has the potential to promote a positive learning environment using humor. Table 1 is a summary of Mark Nichol’s research on the various types and forms of humor¹⁰.

Table 1: Summary of Mark Nichol’s Research on Types and Forms of Humor (Humorous Techniques)¹⁰.

Anecdotal	Refers to comic personal stories that may be true or partly true but embellished.
Blue	A type of broad humor that is unrestrained, unsubtle humor often marked by coarse jokes and sexual situations.
Burlesque	Ridicules by imitating with caricature or exaggerated characterization.
Dark/Morbid	Grim or depressing humor dealing with misfortune and/or death and with a pessimistic outlook.
Deadpan/Dry	Humor delivered with an impassive, expressionless, matter-of-fact presentation.
Droll	Utilizes capricious or eccentric humor.
Epigrammatic	Humor consisting of a witty saying.
Farcical	Comedy based on improbable coincidences and with satirical elements, punctuated at times with overwrought, frantic action.
High/Highbrow	Humor pertaining to cultural, sophisticated themes.
Hyperbolic	Comic presentation marked by extravagant exaggeration and outsized characterization.
Ironic	Humor involving incongruity and discordance with norms, in which the intended meaning is opposite, or nearly opposite, to the literal meaning.

Juvenile/Sophomoric	Humor involving childish themes such as pranks, name-calling and other immature behavior.
Mordant	Caustic or biting humor.
Parodic	Comic imitation often intended to ridicule an author, an artistic endeavor or a genre.
Satirical	Humor that mocks human weaknesses or aspects of society.
Screwball	Humor that deals with unlikely situations and responses to those situations.
Self-deprecating	Humor in which performers target themselves and their foibles or misfortunes for comic effect.
Situational	Humor arising out of quotidian situations.
Slapstick	Comedy in which mock violence and simulated bodily harm are staged for comic effect.
Stand-up	A form of comedy delivery in which a comic entertains an audience with jokes and humorous stories.

Benefits of Using Humor in the Classroom

“A great teacher is one whose classroom is inspiring, exciting and imaginative, and stands apart from the crowd¹¹.” Using humor in the classroom is imaginative and can create excitement, and inspire student interest and learning. The author has noted that the use of humor has raised the level and quality of student participation in his courses. Humor is adaptable to the teaching style of a given instructor. By integrating humor into the classroom, instructors can effectively promote a positive learning environment. Tables 2 and 3 summarize the major benefits derived from using humor in the classroom.

Table 2: Major Benefits Derived from Using Humor in the Classroom^{1, 2, 7, 9, 12}.

<p>Humor in the classroom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaks down communication barriers between professor and students. • Makes students more relaxed by reducing anxiety. • Encourages students to listen. • Indicates that the teacher is human and can share experiences with the class. • Makes students less intimidated and less inhibited to ask questions or make comments. • Promotes student creativity by encouraging them to “take chances, look at things in an offbeat way and even make mistakes in the process⁷.” • “Creates a more positive, fun, interesting environment that promotes class attendance and student performance⁷.” • “Increases comprehension and cognitive retention, since students have less stress and anxiety⁷.” • “Improves students’ attitudes toward the subject and the instructor⁷.” • Makes teaching more fun and enjoyable for the instructor. • Builds group or class cohesion. • Results in higher student evaluations.
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- Can be used to illustrate course-related concepts.
- Has a positive affect on the level of student attention and interest- “it is physically impossible to laugh and snore at the same time⁷.”
- Keeps students engaged and involved with the course materials.
- Creates a positive climate for learning and enjoyment.
- Brings a sense of pleasure and appreciation.
- “Creates a common, positive emotional experience that students share with each other and the teacher².”
- Improves the mental wellbeing of students and the instructor.
- Reduces self consciousness and boost self confidence.
- Lowers student defenses and provokes imagination.
- Creates a positive student-instructor relationship.
- Promotes student open-mindedness.

Table 3: Additional (Physiological) Benefits Derived from Humor and Laughter in the Classroom^{7, 12}.

- Humor and laughter in the classroom:
- Relaxes muscles and reduces chronic pain.
 - Stimulates circulation.
 - Improves respiration.
 - Exercises the lungs and chest muscles.
 - Increases the production of (hormone) endorphins.
 - Boost the immune system.
 - Stimulates the cardiovascular system.
 - Lowers the pulse rate and blood pressure.

Assessment of Humor in the Classroom

At the end of each semester, the author administers Continuous Improvement Surveys to each of his classes. These surveys provide the author with the opportunity to receive anonymous student feedback and develop plans for future course improvements. At the same time, the author has noted that students generally appreciate the opportunity to participate in the future development of the course.

During the Spring and Fall semesters of 2014, the author administered Continuous Improvement Surveys in OLS 35000 (Applied Creativity in Business and Industry) and OLS 25200 (Human Relations for Organizations). He used several questions from surveys developed and administered by Dr. Ron Deiter of Iowa State University⁷. Dr. Deiter’s surveys asked students questions about the use of humor in his classes. The author supplemented Dr. Deiter’s survey questions with four additional questions related to humor in the classroom (questions 12-15). Table 4 lists the results on humor in the classroom from the author’s Continuous Improvement Surveys for three courses.

Survey Ratings Scale (1-5):

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neither Agree/Disagree
 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

Table 4: Student Results on Humor in the Classroom from the Author's Continuous Improvement Surveys (Spring & Fall 2014).

Survey Questions on Humor in the Classroom	OLS 25200 (S14)	OLS 35000 (S14)	OLS 35000 (F14)
1. I am more likely to skip a class where I find the lectures typically boring.	2.87	2.38	3.00
2. I believe I have a better sense of humor than most of my instructors.	3.43	3.63	3.61
3. I am more likely to remember class material if it is presented with humor.	4.22	4.38	4.50
4. The use of humor by an instructor is typically a waste of classroom time.	1.60	1.58	1.68
5. I feel more comfortable asking an instructor a question if s/he uses humor in the classroom.	3.83	4.25	4.43
6. An instructor's job is to teach, not entertain.	2.83	2.33	2.75
7. I would rather have an instructor try to be humorous and fail rather than not try to be humorous at all.	4.14	4.17	4.00
8. I am sometimes offended by the uses of humor by an instructor.	1.43	1.79	1.72
9. I am likely to go to class where the instructor uses some humor.	4.13	4.30	4.50
10. An instructor doesn't have to use humor to be an excellent instructor.	3.96	3.42	3.50
11. I am more likely to pay attention to an instructor if s/he uses humor in a lecture.	4.26	4.04	4.40
12. The use of humor makes classes more fun or interesting.	4.43	4.58	4.64
13. A fun and playful class environment promotes learning.	4.04	4.46	4.68
14. My instructor's humor promotes learning.	4.22	4.25	4.71
15. An instructor can enhance student learning by imitating many of the behaviors or characteristics that an entertainer displays with his/her audience.	4.02	4.08	4.29

OLS 25200 (Spring 2014): Number of Respondents = 23 students
 OLS 35000 (Spring 2014): Number of Respondents = 24 students
 OLS 35000 (Fall 2014): Number of Respondents = 28 students

To assist in the assessment on the use of humor in the classroom for the author's courses, he compared his survey results with those of Dr. Deiter's courses. Table 5 lists the results on humor in the classroom for Dr. Deiter's classes.

Table 5: Student Opinion Survey Results on Humor in the Classroom (Dr. Deiter's classes)⁷.

Survey Questions on Humor in the Classroom	Class #1	Class #2	Class #3
1. I am more likely to skip a class where I find the lectures typically boring.	3.83	3.48	3.83
2. I believe I have a better sense of humor than most of my instructors.	3.46	3.64	3.96
3. I am more likely to remember class material if it is presented with humor.	4.03	4.02	3.96
4. The use of humor by an instructor is typically a waste of classroom time.	2.03	2.00	2.00
5. I feel more comfortable asking an instructor a question if s/he uses humor in the classroom.	3.97	3.61	3.75
6. An instructor's job is to teach, not entertain.	2.71	2.58	2.75
7. I would rather have an instructor try to be humorous and fail rather than not try to be humorous at all.	3.71	3.43	3.45
8. I am sometimes offended by the uses of humor by an instructor.	1.91	2.23	1.94
9. I am likely to go to class where the instructor uses some humor.	3.89	4.00	4.05
10. An instructor doesn't have to use humor to be an excellent instructor.	3.71	3.79	3.94
11. I am more likely to pay attention to an instructor if s/he uses humor in a lecture.	3.91	4.07	4.00

Class #1 (Intermediate Microeconomics): Fall 1996
 Class #2 (Intermediate Microeconomics): Fall 1997
 Class #3 (Agricultural Selling): Spring 1998

Respondents = 35 students
 Respondents = 39 students
 Respondents = 53 students

Assessment Conclusions

The author evaluated the survey results on humor in the classroom for Dr. Deiter's three courses and the author's three courses. He compared the survey questions, survey dates, courses surveyed and teachers involved.

- (1) Survey questions: the same survey questions (questions 1-11) were asked of students in all 6 courses.
- (2) Survey dates: the surveys were administered in different years (Fall 1996, Fall 1997, Spring 1998, and Spring and Fall of 2014).
- (3) Courses surveyed: the surveys were administered with different courses (2 intermediate microeconomics courses, one agricultural selling course, 2 creative thinking courses and one human relations course).
- (4) Teachers surveyed: the surveyed courses were taught by different teachers (Dr. Deiter and the author) and at different universities.

1. When comparing the survey results on humor in the classroom administered by Dr. Deiter and the author, the overall results are relatively consistent. Tables 4 and 5 summarizes the ratings for each of the 6 courses surveyed.

2. Average scores were compared for Dr. Deiter's three courses and the author's three courses on 4 questions dealing with humor and: (a) students remembering class material (b) students asking questions (c) class attendance and (d) students paying attention. Table 6 summarizes the average scores for the 3 courses surveyed by Dr. Deiter and the 3 courses surveyed by the author on questions 3, 5, 9 and 11.

Table 6: Average Score from Dr. Deiter's Three Courses and the Author's Three Courses on Questions 3, 5, 9 and 11.

Survey Questions on Humor in the Classroom	Dr. Deiter (Average Score)	The Author (Average Score)
3. I am more likely to remember class material if it is presented with humor.	4.00	4.37
5. I feel more comfortable asking an instructor a question if s/he uses humor in the classroom.	3.78	4.17
9. I am likely to go to class where the instructor uses some humor.	3.98	4.31
11. I am more likely to pay attention to an instructor if s/he uses humor in a lecture.	3.99	4.20

When comparing the average scores for Dr. Deiter's three courses and the author's three courses on questions 3, 5, 9 and 11, the results are relatively consistent.

3. Also, the author evaluated the average scores for his three surveyed courses on questions 12-14 dealing with: (a) humor and student interest (b) a playful class environment and learning and (c) humor and student learning. The author concluded that there is a positive relationship between humor and learning in his courses. Table 7 summarizes the average scores for the author’s three surveyed courses on questions 12-14.

Table 7: Average Scores from the Author’s Three Courses on Questions 12-14.

Survey Questions on Humor in the Classroom	Average Score
12. The use of humor makes classes more fun or interesting.	4.55
13. A fun and playful class environment promotes learning.	4.39
14. My instructor’ humor promotes learning.	4.39

Guidelines for Integrating Humor into the Classroom

Providing learning opportunities are paramount to helping students achieve academic success. Faculty play a pivot role in generating interest in a course and influencing student learning. Therefore, it’s important for faculty to become familiar with various teaching techniques to promote student interest and learning, including the use of humor in the classroom.

The author has developed a set of guidelines for integrating humor into his courses to create a positive learning environment. The guidelines are based on research and the author’s experience. The guidelines listed below can also be used by other technology and engineering faculty who have the desire to use humor when teaching their classes.

1. Set the Stage for Humor on the First Day of Class

The author sets the stage for humor during the traditional class introduction. Instructors need to recognize that interaction with students is critical to being an effective teacher¹³. “The best teachers put themselves in the students’ shoes¹¹.” The first day of class can provide instructors with opportunities to establish a positive attitude about the course and first impression of the teacher⁷. Humor “helps students feel more comfortable and open to learning⁸.”

The author normally sets the stage for humor in the classroom by talking about some of his personal experiences. For example, after students introduce themselves and provide a personal summary, the author talks about his early background. He tells the class that during his childhood his family moved several times to different neighborhoods within the city (he grew up in), “but he always managed to find them.”

The author has noted that humor tends to be contagious. Once a humorous learning environment and the benefits resulting from it are established, they tend to be self-perpetuating.

2. Study Comedians, Entertainers and Other Teachers

To develop his presentation skills, the author learns from other faculty, comedians and entertainers. He notes how they use humor to generate interest and hold the attention of their audiences. Although the purpose of this paper is not to create “faculty comedians,” teachers can learn from comedians and entertainers by how they approach a given topic³. The author notes their delivery and reaction when humor is effective and not effective. Teachers need to have back-up responses if something that’s supposed to be funny doesn’t get the desired response.

Keep in mind that developing humorous stories and comments is time-consuming and often requires extensive effort. According to comedian and former Tonight Show host Jay Leno, “after a comedian spends hours developing 30 minutes of jokes, s/he needs to eliminate the bad ones and what’s left is 8 minutes of funny.” This should sound familiar to most teachers who spend hours preparing for a 30-minute lecture.

3. Customize Humor to the Individual Instructor

Humor should be tailored to the individual teacher. As noted earlier in the paper, there are different types of comedy and different ways of presenting humor. Believing you are funny and being open to new humorous opportunities are first steps toward creating a positive learning environment. Everyone has the potential to be funny and needs to develop his/her own “humor style.”

For example, the author characterizes his dominate humor style as being primarily a combination of self-disparaging humor and humorous comments/stories. At the same time, he recognizes the need to engage in “style flexing” or the ability to adjust his style to the situation¹⁴. Being flexible allows the author to temporarily deviate from his dominate humor style and demonstrate characteristics of other styles depending on the situation. It’s prudent to be proactive and have a contingency plan or backup style.

Faculty should “use humor that fits comfortably with who they are and how they teach⁹.” Instructors need to have an open-mind about what is funny and look for opportunities to incorporate humor into their courses. Various class assignments, activities and topics can be used to integrate humor in the classroom. Instructors might consider implementing humor into the classroom gradually and experiment with a given topic or course initially. Just as becoming a competent teacher takes years, integrating humor effectively into an instructor’s teaching style also takes time.

4. Don't Substitute Humor for Course Content

“Students don't expect the professor to be a comedian or a clown. They expect the professor to be a teacher and an educator first⁷.” Instructors should not attempt to substitute humor for course content or learning. It's been the author's experience that instructors who use humor often have to demonstrate even greater subject expertise and classroom management skills than instructors who don't. Instructors need to have the ability to quickly switch to a traditional lecture on course content if humor starts to become a distraction to learning.

Instructors and students must realize that humor is secondary or auxiliary to learning course material. Therefore, demonstrating expertise in the discipline is paramount. Although using humor in the classroom has many benefits (see Tables 1 and 2 listing the benefits of humor), it shouldn't be overemphasized. Instead, instructors need to emphasize course content and student learning as the main focus of the class. Humor should be used where it is appropriate or when opportunity allows.

5. Don't Lose Control of the Class if Humor Becomes a Distraction to Learning

“The use of humor should not necessarily distract from the seriousness of the subject matter being discussed⁷.” Instructors need to be vigilant to situations that might occur if a “humorous” comment or story results in a distraction to learning. Vigilance is also required for those students who may have the desire to be the “class clown” or center of attention. Some students may attempt to use a humorous class environment to promote their own agendas, which may become a distraction to learning.

For example, the author recalls a situation when one of his “humorous” comments did not get the desired response from the class. Some students began to engage in disruptive side conversations related to the author's comment. The author dealt with the distraction by immediately resuming the planned lecture, while avoiding any further humorous comments/stories for that class session. Another option the author could have chosen for dealing with the disruption was to start asking the class course-related questions.

Humor should not be the primary focus of the course. Instructors should maintain control of the class through their ability to immediately resume the planned lecture or class activity. Instructors must have the ability to quickly switch to course content on a moment notice to maintain class control. Most experienced teachers, including the author, have developed classroom management techniques for dealing with distractions, whether those distractions are related to humorous comments or not. Always have a backup plan or response for poor humor. “Observe recovery techniques that (Jay) Leno and (David) Letterman use after one of their jokes bombs⁷.”

6. Plan on Using Humorous Comments and Stories at Certain Times During the Semester

At pre-selected times during the semester or with certain topics, the author has prepared humorous comments and stories. For example, one (textbook) chapter in his creative thinking course deals with the “Four-Quad Model of Brain Dominance.” During the lecture, the author will stress the importance for students to develop their (brain) “quads.” As he lectures, he “accidentally” displays a photo of a weight-lifter’s leg quads, instead of a picture of the human brain divided into four quadrants.

Another example is when the author is discussing the importance of having mental toughness to overcome rejection or failure associated with implementing new and creative ideas. He uses the example of the mental toughness President Abraham Lincoln demonstrated to overcome numerous failures he experienced during his early career. However, the author tells the class that based on his research and contrary to a recent movie about President Lincoln, Lincoln was not a “vampire hunter” (referring to the 2012 action horror movie titled- “Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter”).

7. Make Fun of Yourself

The author often uses himself as the subject of humorous jokes, awkward moments, and/or funny stories on past experiences. For example, when talking about risk-taking to promote creative thinking, the author will refer to some of his risk-taking experiences as a young adult. Once at a (dance) club, the author “cut in” to dance with two women who were dancing with each other, “they both immediately sat down and left the author dancing alone.” These types of stories show that the author has experienced awkward situations and can relate to student life challenges. The author has discovered that when he laughs at himself the class environment becomes more relaxed and open.

“Making fun of yourself, your accomplishments, your material, your luck, your job, your personal life, etc. lets your students know that you are human, real, approachable, not arrogant, and not superior to them⁷.” Many well known comedians like Rodney Dangerfield, Woody Allen and Phyllis Diller have developed their careers around self-disparaging humor⁷.

8. Tie Humor to Course Content

Instructors should plan to use humorous real-life examples of what to do or not to do as part of their lecture⁸. Humorous or awkward moments, stories and past experiences can be tied to course topics. For example, when discussing risk-taking to promote creative thinking, the author talks about his younger years and his attempt to be “cool” in order to impress a date. He lights two cigarettes at the same time, one for himself (even though he didn’t smoke) and his date. But then his date tells him that she doesn’t smoke, “so the author felt he had no choice but to smoke both cigarettes by himself, simultaneously.”

Another example is when the author is discussing how “play” can promote learning and creative thinking. He makes reference to the 1939 “Wizard of Oz” movie. The author tells the class that he enjoys watching nature documentaries involving lions and tigers and then points to a random student who never fails to say “bears.” The author tells the class that lion, tiger and bear cubs learn life skills by playing (e.g., fighting with each other, stalking each other, exploring their environment).

9. Keep Track of Humorous Comments and Stories

Teachers should avoid repeating humorous comments and/or stories during the semester. Repeated jokes are not funnier the more often they are stated. A professor doesn’t want to fall victim to the stereotype of appearing “absent-minded.” Along with his lectures, most of the author’s humorous comments are planned and practiced. Just as teachers want to avoid repeating a class lecture, they should take similar efforts to avoid repeating humorous comments and stories. Nothing is more boring and annoying to students than having to listen to a repeated lecture, or humorous comment/story.

The author uses a lesson planner for scheduling lectures, activities, assignments, and humorous comments/stories throughout the semester. Usually, specific humorous comments/stories are tied to a given lecture, activity or assignment. He keeps track of those comments/stories made during the semester by noting what and when certain comments were stated. The author also notes the students’ responses to his comments and how they might be improved for the future.

10. Humor May be Inappropriate with Certain Topics

There are limitations on what topics may be used for humor. Some subjects are not appropriate for humor and the use of humor with certain personal characteristics may even be illegal⁷. Instructors shouldn’t personalize humor toward a specific student or group. This is especially true with sensitive or challenged students. Instructors don’t want their humor to be viewed as a personal attack on students. Humorous comments or stories involving personal characteristics or specific students can subject the instructor to student complaints.

For examples, jokes or humorous comments regarding race, color, religion, disabilities, etc. should be avoided. “Humorous” comments involving legally protected characteristics may constitute harassment or discrimination. Instructors want to avoid using humor that may be viewed as offensive or insulting to students. As previously mentioned, there are a variety of comedic styles or approaches to humor. For some professional comedians, using foul language or making disparaging comments about others is expected and accepted, and virtually any topic can be the subject of humor. Don Rickles and the late Joan Rivers may have the reputation, experience and ability to joke on any given subject and still appear funny, most instructors do not.

Table 8 provides a summary on how instructors can avoid alienating students when using humor in the classroom.

Table 8: Summary on How to Avoid Alienating Students with Humor.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructors should select a humor style that doesn't alienate students. (see Table 1: Summary of Mark Nichol's Research on Types and Forms of Humor). Being humorous is about having a positive and humorous attitude about life in general¹⁵. Everyone can be humorous, but it takes time to develop an effective style that is not offensive.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructors should establish a humorous classroom mood or environment¹⁶. Humor has a contagious quality, in that once students expect humor in the classroom they are more likely to be open and receptive of attempts at humor.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructors should use humor without any malicious intent^{16, 17}. The instructors' overall purpose for using humor should be explained and understood by the students. Instructors can provide advance notice to students of their attempts at humor.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humorous jokes/comments should be planned and practiced, along with anticipating the class reaction to them. To avoid inappropriate humor, preparation is important.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humor involving personal attacks on individual students or groups should be avoided. Instructors should resist the temptation to be humorous at someone else's expense.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid using humor with highly controversial subjects. Instructors should be aware of subjects or topics that are likely to elicit emotions, such as topics dealing with death or harm to others, including animals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humor involving legally protected personal characteristics (e.g., race, color, religion, disabilities, national origin, age, gender) should be avoided.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructors should learn how to be "people" perceptive. When in doubt about student reactions- instructors should not attempt to be humorous in a given situation or with a given topic. In other words, error on the side of caution.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a "humorous" comment is poorly stated, instructors should have a prepared response available. Being proactive by developing a contingency plan (e.g., joke clarification or explanation) can help to avoid alienating students.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructors should develop a positive relationship with students. Humor should be a small part of the instructors' overall interactions with students. If the instructor has a positive relationship with students, they are likely to view all instructor interactions, including humor, in a positive light.

Substantive Examples on Integrating Humor into Specific Topics and Assignments

The author provides substantive examples on how humor can be incorporated into specific engineering and/or technology topics and assignments. For example, humor can be used with class topics and assignments involving: (1) planning and scheduling, (2) just in time (JIT), (3) plant layout, (4) methods and motion studies, (5) statistical techniques, (6) measuring performance, (7) continuous improvement, (8) laboratory work, (9) multidisciplinary learning, and (10) flowchart diagramming.

(1) Topic: Planning and Scheduling

After providing students with a newspaper article on the poor performance of a given company, the author asked the class to brainstorm ideas on how forecasting, capacity utilization and material requirements planning (MRP) can improve operations and workload.

Humorous comment to the class: “Let’s see if the class can forecast how many of my jokes will be funny over the course of the semester.”

Humorous comment to the class: “I have an inventory of jokes that must be used this week since the semester is ending- all jokes must go.”

(2) Topic: Just in Time (JIT)

When discussing global competition, the author divided the class into problem-solving teams to brainstorm ideas on how implementing “Just in Time” (JIT) can reduce waste to meet the global competitive challenge.

Humorous comment to the class: “We will reduce wasted time in class by limiting the number of attempted humorous comments I make. There, I finally came up with something useful and funny- just in time.”

(3) Topic: Plant Layout

After providing students with a newspaper article on industry consolidation of manufacturing companies, the author divided the class into groups to brainstorm ideas on how efficient plant layouts can reduce costs.

Humorous comment to the class: “I suddenly remember, the plant layout I just described didn’t work on my last consulting job- maybe that’s why the company filed for bankruptcy.” After making the comment, the author described other plant layouts.

(4) Topic: Methods and Motion Studies

When discussing a news report on U.S. companies investing overseas, the class discussed reasons why different production costs exist between the U.S. and other countries.

Humorous comment to the class: “Speaking of motion studies, maybe my jokes will sound funnier if I move around while I’m telling them.”

(5) Topic: Statistical Techniques

When dealing with manufacturing unemployment, the author discussed with the class some of the causes of the unemployment. While using statistical methods to review the unemployment data, the class generated ideas for reducing manufacturing unemployment.

Humorous comment to the class: “Now that the class understands statistical techniques, maybe you can statistically determine how many of my comments were actually funny this week and why.”

(6) Topic: Measuring Performance

When discussing the decline in U.S. productivity, the class brainstormed ideas on how to accurately measure employee performance and improve organizational productivity.

Humorous comment to the class: “Speaking of measuring performance, I also measure and evaluate my comedic performance after every class- and so far, I’m failing.”

(7) Topic: Continuous Improvement

After providing students with a newspaper article on offshore outsourcing, the class was divided into teams to brainstorm ideas on how organizations can reduce waste and improve the efficiency of the factors of production in order to limit outsourcing.

Humorous comment to the class: “I’m beginning to believe that the only way to improve my jokes is to outsource and hire a professional joke writer for next semester- I wonder if one is available for \$7.25/hour?”

(8) Laboratory Work: For courses involving laboratory work, working safely in the laboratory should be discussed.

Humorous comment to the class: “Look at me (my physical appearance), I’m an example of what can happen to you if you don’t work safely in the lab.”

(9) Multidisciplinary Learning: The author sometimes incorporates multidisciplinary learning into his courses to expose students to different career concerns they may encounter in the corporate world. For example, when workplace conflict was discussed, the author talked about how a lack of conflict can actually impair team performance and personal relationships.

Humorous comment to the class: “Now that I have discussed how a lack of conflict can impair relationships- I want each student to go home and get into an argument with his/her significant other.”

(10) Flowchart Diagraming: One way the author describes the creative problem solving process is through the use of a flowchart.

Humorous comment to the class: “Now that you understand how to create a flowchart, I’ll show you how to diagram some of your future life challenges- including multiple marriages, how to deal with in-laws and blended-family situations, and family-related financial concerns.”

Conclusion

Teaching effectiveness is an on-going challenge for most faculty, including the author. The author’s experience as a teacher, industry trainer and group presenter helped him to recognize that humor can enhance interest and learning in a given topic. As a result, he

has been using humor to promote a positive learning environment in the courses he teaches.

The paper identifies the benefits derived from using humor as a classroom teaching technique. Also, the author describes his course assessments on humor, and the guidelines he developed and follows for creating a positive classroom learning environment. By implementing the guidelines provided in the paper, other technology and engineering faculty can integrate humor into their courses to establish a positive learning environment.

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