

You are here:

## TEACHING @ SYDNEY

March 2013

---



### What is it like being a first year student?

As any student will tell you, the first lecture at university is both an exciting and harrowing experience. While such an event symbolises the start of a new chapter in a student's life, it also raises a multitude of questions that can cause anyone to feel anxious: How do I get the most out of these lectures? Who is this person at the front of the room? Who will I be sitting near? And by far the most pressing question for the student - Is this what I really want to do? The lecturer plays an integral role in helping the student to answer these questions, despite these questions being very individualistic and personal, due to the lecturer's control over the learning environment.

One of the best methods a lecturer can employ to help a student to come to terms with these uncertainties is to encourage social interaction between their students. This point may be overlooked, as it seems that many academics believe the most productive thing for students to do in lectures is listen.

Solitary study can lead to high drop out rates of first year students since it does not provide them with an opportunity to develop a social network that will allow them to feel comfortable in the learning environment. The lecturer has the ability to encourage group work such that students can build friendship bases, which can also contribute to higher attendance rates later in the semester. Therefore, lecturers that encourage group work within their course will find that they help their students to find their feet at university and produce a more pleasant learning environment that will likely have a greater student attendance.

***Joe Callingham is a Postgraduate student in the School of Physics, Faculty of Science.***

---

If you're teaching a first year unit of study, you may be interested in looking at either the [First Year Experience](#) or [Transition to University](#) websites, which have a range of useful resources for planning and teaching.

---

