

## TBL in a Gen Ed Media History Class

I also regularly teach COMM 2200, Mass Media History, a general education course meeting the historical understandings category. The class is taught using TBL.

Like with the law class, I began designing the course by identifying student learning outcomes:

- Explain how media industries have changed over time, including comparing the shared functions of old and new media.
- Identify, explain, and evaluate historical evidence in a variety of media forms.
- Identify, collect, and analyze primary and secondary historical sources used in constructing historical narratives.
- Identify and evaluate differing historical narratives about the media.
- Create understandable and logical historical arguments about the media and our society.
- Explain the relationship between media systems of the past and our current media system.

I then divided the course into a series of units. Each unit begins with assigned readings and readings assessments (individual and group quizzes for some readings and pre-class reading assignments for others). Based on the reading assessments I often follow up the readings with a mini “lecture” before we launch into a series of group activities.

Group activities ask students to critically evaluate historical narratives, to analyze primary sources, and to practice creating historical narratives. For example, over the course of the semester groups:

- write a definition of history;
- debate the most important developments in the history of a medium and a create a time line;

- identify and evaluate primary and secondary historical sources; debate whether news is a first draft of history;
- evaluate news stories as possible primary or secondary sources; practice conducting oral history interviews;
- deconstruct historical arguments from a series of secondary sources; evaluate conflicting historical narratives;
- debate the role of open-source history;
- evaluate open-source narratives from Wikipedia; and
- create comparative media histories.

Outside of their groups, students complete a series of individual assessments to evaluate learning. These individual assessments build on the skills practiced during group activities. Examples of individual assessments include:

- an oral history project;
- a comparative media history project;
- a project evaluating conflicting historical narratives;
- reading assignments deconstructing historical narratives; and
- a final exam during which students are asked to critically evaluate conflicting primary and secondary sources about a famous episode in media history.

# Team Based Learning

## Implementing active learning in a course

### TBL - The Basics

Team-based learning (TBL) is a teaching approach designed to encourage critical thinking and student engagement. In a TBL classroom, the focus is shifted away from the delivery of content through lectures to the application of knowledge through in-class group activities.

TBL provides a structured approach to learning in which students acquire knowledge through out-of-class resources, are quizzed on the basics of that knowledge through in-class individual and group assessments, and then apply that knowledge through group activities. While short lectures are used to clarify information students struggled with in the initial assessments, the majority of in-class time is dedicated to the application and discussion of concepts rather than the conveyance of information through lectures (Sweet and Michaelsen, 2012).

### Course Design

TBL classes are designed using a “backward design” approach. Instead of starting with a list of topics to cover, an instructor starts by identifying the course’s learning outcomes. Once the learning outcomes are identified, an instructor should use them to determine what topics to cover, what form in-class activities will take, and what means will be used to assess student learning (Michaelsen & Sweet, 2008).

### Structuring the Class

Once a learning outcome is identified, a learning experience is often structured around the following:

- out-of-class learning resources, such as readings, videos, etc that students need to review prior to the first class in which the topic/unit/learning outcome is addressed;
- individual and group quizzes designed to assess learning from out-of-class resources;
- a mini “lecture” to clarify information that students struggled with from the out-of-class resources, as identified by the quizzes;
- group activities in which students are asked to apply the information and skills obtained from the out-of-class resources, in class “lecture,” and group activities;
- a test, out-of-class project, paper, or other form of assessment designed to assess individual mastery of the learning outcome.

### Working in Groups

A key to the TBL approach is the use of groups in class. Students should be assigned to the same group for the entire semester. Group work is only done in class, with no outside group work required. Group size can vary, but I have found groups of 4-5 to work best. Students can be assigned to groups

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in a number of ways, but a strong case has been made for randomly assigning students to groups. I have students draw numbers on the first day of class. You can also have UTC Learn randomly assign groups.

### Group Activities

Integral to the TBL approach are in-class group learning activities. These activities can take a number of forms including, but not limited to, solving a problem, discussing a reading or a current event, creating a concept map, evaluating historical sources, or designing a research project.

Activities should be designed to step students through the learning process with discreet activities. While working through the activity, groups should record their progress (for example, by answering questions) so their work can be reported to the larger class and to the instructor. I use paper worksheets with questions for groups to answer.

Groups should be provided with a time-frame for completing the activity (either as a whole or broken into smaller pieces). At the end of the time provided the class should come back together, with groups called on to report their work. During the reporting process, the instructor can clarify and expand upon important concepts.

TBL research suggests instructors should resist the urge to interact with groups while they work through an activity. Instead, instructors should stand back and allow groups the opportunity to figure things out for themselves.

### Feedback

Feedback is an important component of TBL, and is provided to students through a number of mechanisms.

To provide immediate feedback during group quizzes instructors may want to use the IF AT scratch off cards provided by Epstein Educational Enterprises.

During group activities the reporting of group results to the full class is an important form of feedback. Handling back graded groups activities is another opportunity for feedback.

Finally, peer evaluation of group members is a crucial tool for students to provide feedback to each other. TBL suggests peer evaluation to occur at the midterm and end of semester. I use peer evaluation at the end of the semester, with students evaluating group members on a series of criteria defined by a rubric.

### Does Class Size Matter?

In my experience, no. I've used TBL in a class of 16 (with 4 groups of 4) and a class of 200 (with 40 groups of 5). In fact, I've found TBL to be quite effective in large classes.

### Online?

TBL can also be used in online classes. Please consult TBL literature for more information.

## Resources

Sweet, M. & Michaelsen L.K. (2008).

"The Essential Elements of Team-Based Learning" *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 116, p. 7-27.

Sweet, M. & Michaelsen L.K. (2012).

Team-Based Learning in the Social Science and Humanities: Group Work That Works to Generate Critical Thinking and Engagement. Stylus: Sterling, VA.

Team Based Learning Collective:

[www.teambasedlearning.org](http://www.teambasedlearning.org)

## TBL in a Media Law Class

Several years ago I took over COMM 4510, a communication law & ethics class, and decided to use a TBL approach in the course.

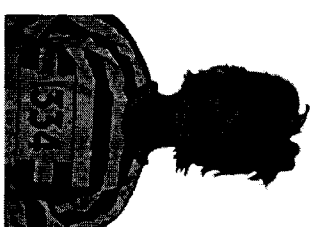
I started to redesign the course by identifying what I wanted students to be able to do by the end of the semester:

- identify and apply relevant regulations, common laws, and court cases to legal scenarios,
- identify the protections and limitations of the First Amendment,
- identify and apply key concepts related to defamation,
- demonstrate an understanding of basic intellectual property protections,
- identify and apply privacy torts and laws,
- generate a personal ethical statement, and
- apply ethical theories and guidelines to professional scenarios.

I then divided the course into several units (1st Amendment, defamation, intellectual property, privacy, and ethics) and selected readings for students to complete before class. At the start of each unit or topic students take individual and group quizzes on the assigned readings. Then we dive into a series of group activities in which groups are asked to solve legal scenarios.

Each in-class group activity is designed to lead students through the process of finding and applying relevant regulations and cases to the scenario. Students are encouraged to consult course materials to help solve the scenario. At the end of each scenario, groups are required to report their decisions to the class, enabling a classroom discussion of relevant legal concepts, and why they may or may not apply to each case.

When I create the group activities I look to news stories and legal cases for inspiration. Many of the legal scenarios are based on real cases, but with some of the facts changed and simplified. For example, over the course of a semester Quinn C. Law, a fictional character featured in a number of group activities:



- was thrown out of a university event when he wore an insulting t-shirt.
- faced a prior restraint when he tried to publish top-secret government documents.
- challenged a local law banning alcohol advertising near elementary schools.
- faced a number of copyright and trademark issues when he formed a band called the Jiffy Pops.
- and was sued by Kim Kardashian for commercial appropriate and publication of embarrassing private facts.

When necessary, I conduct mini "lectures" in which I clarify concepts students struggled with on the individual and group quizzes and/or on the group activities.

At the end of each unit student learning is assessed through a test in which students are asked, on an individual basis, to solve new legal scenarios.

By the end of the semester students are able to effectively apply regulations and court cases to legal scenarios and provide Quinn with sound legal advice.