Section Preparation: Some Suggestions for TF Meetings

In large lecture courses with multiple sections, each teaching fellow is an autonomous leader of his or her sections(s). Each TF facilitates discussions, responds to students’ questions, stimulates students’ interest, provides feedback on students’ work, and determines students’ grades. No two section meetings can ever be the same. Nevertheless, students like to know that what they learn in section is essentially similar to what their classmates learn in other sections. By addressing the following issues in TF meetings, TFs can work together with the course head to ensure that they are providing equal opportunities for all students in a lecture course.

The Big Picture
What is the relationship between this week’s section meeting and this week’s lectures? What is the connection between this week’s concerns and those of last week and next week? How do this week’s concerns fit into the context of the whole course?

Essential Material
What essential texts, ideas, information, etc., should be offered to all students in sections this week? What skills should be emphasized?

Main Points
What main points should all students understand when they leave their section meetings this week? Are there several crucial ideas that should be conveyed to all students in the course?

Teaching Strategies
What are some effective ways to help students understand the essential materials and main points covered in this week’s sections? Can TFs agree on several questions that might help students to begin discussing the material or main points for this week’s sections? Would an in-class writing exercise or a small group activity be a worthwhile way to call students’ attention to the week’s essential materials and main points? Because students learn differently, each TF may find it useful to use a variety of teaching/learning techniques in section meetings.

Students’ Preparation
How can TFs help students prepare for the next section meeting? Can TFs jointly craft a set of study questions that will help all students focus on next week’s main points while they are doing the required reading? Can TFs jointly draft instructions that will guide students in preparing for a debate, presentation, or small group exercise in next week’s section? Study questions and/or instructions may be posted on the course Web page, e-mailed, or distributed in section.