

Innovation
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Dedications

Each semester for each of the courses I teach, I create a one-page course announcement that includes the basic information I want prospective students to have as they decide whether or not to enroll – a brief course description, texts, meeting time and place, etc. At the bottom of the page I include a dedication – identifying someone or something significant in my life to whom (or to which) I want to dedicate my work in the class that semester. At the close of the first class meeting, sitting in a circle, I invite each class member to dedicate her/his work in the class to someone (something) who (which) has played a significant role in her/his life. One by one, we each share our personal dedication as we light a candle. After all the dedications have been made, we sit silently for a few moments in our circle of lighted candles in appreciation of the “spirits” who have joined us for the semester by way of our dedications. We then go back around the circle for a closing comment from everyone and as each comment is made, the speaker blows out her/his candle. When all of the candles have been extinguished, the class is officially over and we go our separate ways. I feel the personal dedication invites each of us to do her/his very best work in the class as a way of honoring the person/thing to whom/which the dedication has been made. It is certainly a memorable way to end the first class meeting and a powerful way to begin the semester.

(A note on candles: Tea candles can be hand-held and pose no problem with dripping. Other candles can be “skirted” to catch the dripped wax. For a great effect when the class meets at night on the beach, each of us creates a *luminario* – a couple of handfuls of sand in a paper lunch bag [white works best] – into which a candle is set.)