

# Ronald Vance Bjarnason Jr.

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My teaching is driven by my firm belief that students will excel if they know what is expected of them. I strive to teach the classes that the students refer to with “that was hard, but I learned so much”. Each assignment, class period, project and test should influence the student to individually master the material.

**Classtime:** Lecture hours are the primary method of teaching the course material, and as an instructor, I take responsibility to make class time an interactive and valuable experience for each student. I strive to learn the name of each student so that I can call them by name in class. I prefer to write on the board to encourage note-taking and attentiveness, and I do not provide electronic versions of the lecture material. To encourage participation, students who volunteer to approach the board may solicit help from their seated classmates. When I suspect that the material has not been understood, I petition each student individually to discover their relative level of understanding. While this may make the occasional student uncomfortable, it is fair to all students and provides valuable feedback to me as an instructor. Material covered in class will be the main source of questions for study guides and tests.

**Testing:** My testing methods are designed to give students incentive to master the course material. This is generally accomplished by giving students a comprehensive study guide and composing the test from questions taken verbatim from this study guide. Most questions on the study guide are short answer questions requiring fundamental understanding of the processes and algorithms discussed in class. The study guide should be inclusive enough so that I would be convinced a student has mastered the material if they have mastered the study guide. The students get the study guide a few days, perhaps a week, prior to the exam. The students know that the exam will be composed of questions copied verbatim from the study guide. On the day prior to the exam, I dedicate time to resolve any final questions students have on the study guide. I tell the students that it will be easier to learn the material than it will be to memorize the answers, and I make the study guide comprehensive enough to back me up. In each of the courses I have taught, I have had two midterms and a final exam. Students have typically struggled on the first midterm, with a majority failing to complete the test in the allotted time. On following exams, the students studied much harder, and the majority finished on time, and performance improved significantly. In preparation for the second midterm, I had one struggling student inform me that it took him 8 hours to go through the study guide. Then he did it again. He excelled in my class not because of prior experience or natural talents, but rather because I took the time to spell out what I expected.

**Grading:** Without it becoming an undue burden on myself or my TAs, I encourage students to complete late assignments for partial credit. Most recently, I have given 80% credit for assignments up to a week late, and 60% credit after that. I am willing to extend full credit to students in extenuating situations, but with a liberal late policy, this is not usually necessary. Occasionally throughout the course, I take a few minutes of class time to break down projected grades according to the current totals. This lets the students know where they stand, and provides impetus for students to complete missing assignments.

**Office Hours:** When possible, I prefer to hold weekly office hours in the locale where the students work. Many students feel uncomfortable invading the private space of a professor’s office, and are more likely to seek help if given the opportunity on neutral ground.