



About this Resource

This guide is a joint collaboration of HGSE's [Teaching and Learning Lab](#) (TLL) and HKS's [Strengthening Learning and Teaching Excellence](#) (SLATE) Initiative. The advice below for faculty members is a synthesis of perspectives of a wide array of community members from both schools, including faculty, students, members of the teaching and learning centers, and other administrative staff.

Shopping Overview

HGSE designates two days in the week before the semester starts as Shopping Days. Students “shop” for courses they want to take by visiting short sessions that provide an opportunity for faculty to disseminate key information about the course, give students a flavor of what the course experience will feel like, and allow students time to ask questions. Shopping meetings are descriptive of the course as a whole and don't replace the first regularly scheduled class meeting. Faculty are expected to be present for Shopping Days, but students are not required to shop a course they elect to take.

Shopping Format

Each course is available for shopping as follows: (1) one 40-minute session; (2) a 5-minute break to allow students to move between shopping sessions; and (3) a second 40-minute shopping session that is a repeat of the first. In some cases, shopping may only be available via recording.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Throughout the years, the following questions have emerged regarding what students generally hope to discover during a course shopping session:

- Who is the faculty member, and what is their teaching style?
- Does this course seem to be a good fit for me given how I like to learn?
- Does this course seem to be a good fit for me given what I want to learn?
- How does this course differ from other courses offered?
- What time commitment should I expect to make in this course?
- How is this course going to help me advance professionally?

There are challenges to addressing these questions well in such a short amount of time, and the following tips may help you plan for an effective shopping session.

1 Teach

Course shopping provides an excellent opportunity for you to go beyond the course description and the syllabus, which are now easily accessible online, to provide students with a short experience that authentically represents the content, pedagogy, and engagement in the course. An ideal session would explore some core aspect of the course's content, use an engaging instructional method that is representative of your teaching, and take no more than 15 to 20 minutes. Here are several examples of how faculty have accomplished these goals:

- **Raise a key question** from the course and have students share their current thinking on the topic. The conversation may involve small group discussions and / or online polls. (The data unearthed in these sessions can potentially be a point of departure for the first official class session.) You can then discuss some ways in which this question is addressed in your class, perhaps relating it to contemporary problems of practice in the field.
- **Lead a “mini case discussion”** that uses an example from the field to illustrate one or more key aspects of the course. After students work to diagnose the case, you can use the conversation to highlight how the class will shed light on this and similar scenarios.
- **Deliver a mini-lecture** that presents the road map of the course and dives into one interesting aspect with a bit more depth. If possible, use a method to engage the students in a way that you tend to do in class, and discuss with them how this teaching style relates to what they will experience in the course.

2 Clarify

It can be helpful to ask yourself: “What do students absolutely need to know to help them decide if this course is a good fit for them?” In answering that question, and crafting this component of a shopping session, here are some general tips:

- Don't read the syllabus or spend the time talking in great detail about grading or other policies, unless doing so will be crucial for students' decision-making.
- If the course has any kind of lottery or unique registration processes, be very clear about the steps and timeline involved. It is best to also make sure this information is echoed on the course homepage before shopping.
- Leave at least 10 minutes for questions. It can be a good idea to ask people to save particularly idiosyncratic questions and have them ask you or a member of your teaching team after the session.

3 Plan

Given the brevity and importance of shopping, make specific plans for how to allocate your time. It also can be helpful to do a dry run of your session, with a colleague or consultant providing you some feedback. TLL consultants are also available to help you tailor your shopping session to best represent your course and meet the needs of your prospective students. Please reach out to us at tll@gse.harvard.edu.