ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

From the Office of the Associate Dean Vol. 9 No. 1

Engaging Students in the Learning Process

Faculty cannot learn for students; students must learn for themselves. But faculty can make learning a more likely outcome of a classroom experience. They can also influence the course of events by how they teach. Here is a list that identifies what you can do, with concrete ideas as to how you go about realizing some of these abstract ideals.

Care - Congressman Jack Kemp made the point: "People don't care what you know until they know that you care." Do it by offering to meet individually with students at the beginning of a course. Or send an individual e-mail welcoming them to class.

Be real - Be real by recognizing this hard, cold fact: many students would rather socialize, sleep, or exercise than study or attend class. Teachers have to work to make the content relevant. Teachers also have to work to connect with students. Do it by getting to class early and interacting informally with students here and there around the classroom.

Be prepared - Know what the current best teaching practices are. Keep up with new developments in your field. And be prepared to learn from students. Do it by creating plans for individual class sessions that include a variety of activities.

Find a classroom style that works - Love your class and love being in your class. Do it by supporting your efforts with technology that works for you.

Laughter is good - It creates climates more ripe for learning. Do it by using self-deprecating humor. Make fun of your graying hair, flat feet, or widening girth. Start class with music playing in the background or share a favorite cartoon.

Have high standards - Have them for both your students and yourself. Do it by explaining the rationale behind assignments that work students hard. Do it by having a specific aspect of your instruction that you seek to improve every semester.

Teach with passion, evaluate with compassion - Instructor enthusiasm has been linked to learning by a variety of different research. Compassion allows a graceful exit from the stage. Do it by allowing extra credit now and then, under some conditions.

Be humble - All knowledge does not emanate from the podium. Do it by "fessing up" when you honestly don't know the answer to a question.

There is a time and place for everything - Instructors are busy but so are students. Do it by providing hints for studying for exams well before the exams. Add extra office hours before an exam or answer emails until 11 p.m. the night before the exam.

Go straight - Being straight means helping students with decisions about their future and exploring the ethical responsibility. Do it by doing what you say you're going to do (an apologizing when you don't) and by regularly challenging the ethical aspects of decision-making processes.

Do not use a red pen to correct - Colors other than red help to neutralize critical comments.

Set boundaries - Keep a list of appropriate referral sources handy so that, when a student's performance, or lack thereof, in class is the result of personal concerns, you can steer the student to help, and can remain a teacher.

If it isn't written down, it didn't happen - Students cannot fairly be held responsible if teachers have failed to put the rule in writing.

Attend every in service on teaching you can - Yes, you will learn by trial and error in the classroom, but why not learn from and with others who have already been there?

Prepare for a new year, each year - Every year is a new beginning with new students, new perspectives, new texts, new information, and probably new subjects to teach. Take time to throw out, file and rearrange. Hang a new picture, but keep the same motto on the door: I am here to help you succeed.

Adapted from an article by A.S. Mann in *The Teaching Professor*, December 2004.

Myths and Facts About Teaching and Learning

Myth 1: Blank stares and bovine-like eyes on student faces are inevitable and unavoidable; expect to see them when teaching.
Fact: Human curiosity is a natural gift that good teachers can rekindle and nurture.
Myth 2: Lectures, even well-planned ones, dampen enthusiasm for learning.
Fact: Students lack knowledge and can benefit from professors whose lectures connect to their individual experiences. However, few professors are gifted lecturers.
Myth 3: Effective teaching occurs in direct proportion to time on task.
Fact: The quantity of time spent on learning something is not a reliable variable in itself. While time can be an important element in learning, the key to effective teaching is always the quality of the time, i.e., how engaged the learner is with the subject matter.
Myth 4: Teaching someone something adds to his or her storehouse of knowledge.
Fact: Teaching is more than telling someone something new. Teaching occurs when learning happens, and learning results when students are engaged with new information in contexts meaningful to them.
Myth 5: Tests contribute to the learning process because they show what the students have learned.
Fact: Exams hold students accountable and can give important feedback that reinforces learning. Learning, however, is only demonstrated in students' ability to apply their new knowledge in different contexts.
Myth 6: The best teachers are those professors with a reputation for being hard.
Fact: Rigor is good when it means maximum, meaningful learning. Rigor is bad when it means excessive and irrelevant requirements for the learner.
Myth 7: Professors with a reputation for making learning "fun" have sacrificed standards.
Fact: Emotion is a basic human structure connected to learning. The best teachers find ways to touch the joy of learning.
Myth 8: Twenty-first century technological advances are demonstrating how dispensable teachers are.
Fact: Students need teachers' assistance in learning. The process of learning requires the organization, insightful challenges, feedback, and motivation that good teachers provide.
Myth 9: The traditional role of teacher, the "coverer" of essential subject matter, is vital.
Fact: Teaching in the traditional sense is vastly overrated. Learners often learn despite unnecessary emphasis on coverage but find such teaching mostly irrelevant.
Myth 10: College students are ready for symbolic thought and higher order reasoning.
Fact: Half of college freshman have not reached this formal stage of cognitive development. The most effective professors take this research into account and otherwise plan for concrete-thinking students by fostering interaction between students and their physical environment, and between students and others (including professors and peers).

Adapted from an article by T.R. Rosebrough in *The Teaching Professor,* August/September 2004.

Commencement 2005

Sunday, May 15, 2005
9:30 a.m. ACES Undergraduate Convocation
10:00 a.m. ACES Graduate Convocation
2:00 p.m. Commencement

APB

All points bulletin—for the book "147 Practical Tips for Teaching Professors" by Robert Magnan. Last seen in 115 LIAC, the Academy Room. Please help this book return to its place on the shelf.

"If you want to build a ship, don't herd people together to gather wood, and don't assign them tasks and work; but rather, teach them to yearn for the endless immensity of the sea."
---Antoine deSaint - Exupery

Class Attendance

Here is something to share with your students during the first class session. The information is taken from an article by K.A. Rocco, which was a comprehensive review of the literature on student attendance (http://ject .lib.muohio.edu, and click on Volume 14, Issue 1).

- The correlation between class attendance and course grade is between r =.29 and r=.73.
- The number of absences in a course accounts for 56 percent of the variance in course grades.
- Student performance is better when attendance is mandatory.

Behaviors that Show Respect

- Recognition of student perspectives-asking for students' opinions and taking their responses into account when making decisions, getting to know students individually.
- Treatment of students-demonstrating kindness and concern for the student and showing sensitivity to the students' concerns.
- Task-related help-responding to questions and providing help for students having difficulty.
- Responsiveness to unusual situations-making exceptions for students with special needs.
- Affirmation of students-confirming the value of students' contributions to class discussions and other class activities; how instructors respond to incorrect answers.
- Nondefensiveness-responding nondefensively to questions and challenges.
- Class integrity-being honest and truthful with students, demonstrating trust in students, fair and impartial treatment.

Adapted from an article by E.H. Buttner in *The Teaching Professor,* December 2004.

ACES Student
Awards Banquet
Sunday, April 24, 2005
12:00 noon
Hawthorne Suites, Champaign

Provost's Teaching Retreat

There is still time to register for the 11th Annual UIUC Faculty Retreat on Active Learning. The theme this year is **"Knowing What Students Do: Making the Learning Process Visible."** This retreat will be held Monday, January 31, 2005 from 8:00 – 2:00 in Illini Union Ballroom A/B. Previous retreats have consistently presented innovative ideas and approaches to enhance teaching and learning. Past attendees have commented on how valuable these opportunities have been for interacting with other faculty and gaining insights about our classroom teaching.

The keynote speaker is Randy Bass from Georgetown University. Along with being the Executive Director of Georgetown University's Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship (CNDLS), he is also the Director of the Visible Knowledge Project (VKP), a 5-year project exploring the impact of technology on learning in the humanities. Randy is currently a Senior Scholar at the Carnegie Foundation. He recently won the EDUCAUSE Medal for outstanding achievement in information and undergraduate education. Randy is well-received both nationally and internationally as a speaker on integration of new technologies, pedagogy, and educational change. One of the areas that Randy will address is the improvement of the quality of higher education teaching through a focus on both student learning and faculty development in technology-enhanced environments.

Information on registration can be accessed at http://www.conferences.uiuc.edu/facultyretreat or at 333-7369.

Spring 2005 Teaching Enhancement Grants proposals are due February 15. The program announcement for spring competition is enclosed in this publication.

How to Improve Student Learning

Idea #1
Give students a thorough orientation to the course.

Students should know from the beginning how a class is going to be taught, how they are going to be assessed, and what they should be striving to achieve. They should know, from the beginning, what they are going to be doing most of the time and what exactly is expected of them in that process. The aim of the course should be carefully spelled out. If you are emphasizing critical thinking, it is helpful to contrast the aim and design with that of standard didactically taught courses. You might begin the course with something like the following introduction:

"This class is going to be different from any class you have taken thus far because the emphasis will be on actively developing your thinking. Everything we do in this class will be designed to help you become better and better at thinking within the subject. You will therefore not be asked to memorize information rotely. Instead, you will be required to internalize information by using it actively in every class and in class assignments. Each day we will be attempting to improve your thinking. Think of learning about thinking (within the field) as you would of learning a sport. To learn to play tennis, you need to first learn the fundamentals of tennis at an elementary level and then practice those fundamentals during every practice session. The same is true of learning to think better within this field. You must be introduced to the fundamentals of sound thinking. Then you must regularly practice those fundamentals. Therefore I will design every class day with the primary purpose of helping you develop your thinking or reasoning skills. Why is this important? The quality of every decision you make will be directly determined by the quality of your reasoning abilities. In fact the quality of your life in general will be determined by how well you think in general."

From *30 Practical Ideas on How to Improve Student Learning*, Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2002.

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