



FOR TEACHING



From the desk of the Teaching and Learning Scholar

Student to parent: "I really liked my teacher. He seemed really friendly."

Student to another student: "The prof wasn't organized and she didn't seem happy."

Student to their adviser: "I need to find a new course to take. The professor scared me!"

Although I am not as happy about starting winter courses compared to fall, I still get excited and somewhat anxious as I prepare for the semester. What will my students be like? Will they like me? Will they be quiet or talkative? Will the teaching feel collaborative or be driven mostly by me? Will they be excited to learn? What will the semester be like? How many inclement weather days should I plan for?

It is important for faculty to be well prepared for the first class day in order to make a good early impression, clearly communicate course expectations, and establish a supportive learning environment. McGuire (2015) offers the following three strategies for the first course meeting. Prior to class, be sure to design your syllabus to be crystal-clear and include multiple ways for students to demonstrate learning. If you are using graded assignments, (papers or projects) provide rubrics to explain how you will evaluate their work. Next, share something personal about yourself so that students see you as a human. She suggests that you share a story about a course that you struggled with in college. Students want to know that you have had academic challenges too. Be sure to tell them that you expect them to succeed in your course. Talk about how much growth you expect them to experience. (For more information about growth and fixed mindsets see the Carol Dweck reference below), Third, develop rapport among students using small group discussions focusing on metacognition. Divide the students into several groups and ask them to answer the following questions: 1) What do you believe is important to learn and understand in (course name)? 2) What do you believe are critical characteristics of successful students in this course? and 3) How will you study and prepare for exams in this course?

In addition, faculty should begin building personal relationships with their students starting on day one. Doyle (2011) offers some simple yet practical advice for establishing personal relationships and a caring classroom. For example, he recommends smiling and greeting students as they enter the classroom. He also suggests using inviting words and community language such as 'I would like us all to...' and "we will be learning together...." This semester, my co-instructor and I have adopted a new textbook, so I plan to tell the students "we will be reading the book together and exploring the related online resources." Doyle (2011) also advocates for talking to students individually and getting to know them personally. One new strategy that I plan to try this semester is to have the students make name cards to place in front of them so that I can more quickly learn their names (Gabriel, 2008). I also routinely ask students to complete a personal profile form to which I attach their individual roster photo. The picture profile is helpful for learning names and personal information about my students. For my online courses, I have had the students use Voice Thread to complete this same assignment. Use of this interactive technology works well as an icebreaker and helps everyone feel more connected in the online environment. Feel free to email me to request a copy of my student profile form.

I hope I have provided at least one new idea for the first course day. Have a great first week of the semester!



FOR TEACHING



From the desk of the Teaching and Learning Scholar

References

- Doyle, T. (2011). *Learner-centered teaching: Putting the research on learning into practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Gabriel, K. (2008). *Teaching underprepared students. Strategies for promoting success and retention in higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Farnam Street Media. (2019). Carol Dweck: A summary of growth and fixed mindsets. Retrieved December 29, 2019, from <https://fs.blog/2015/03/carol-dweck-mindset/>
- McGuire, S. Y. (2015). *Teach students how to learn. Strategies you can incorporate into any course to improve student metacognition, study skills, and motivation*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.