FACULTY FOCUS

Special Report

Building Student Engagement: 15 Strategies for the College Classroom

Featuring content from

December 2009

A MAGNA PUBLICATION

BUILDING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: 15 STRATEGIES FOR THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

The reasons why students need to be involved and engaged when they attend college are well established. Engagement can be the difference between completing a degree and dropping out. Research has sought to identify what makes student involvement more likely. Factors like student-faculty interaction, active and collaborative learning experiences, involvement in extracurricular activities, and living on campus have all been shown to make a difference.

Not surprisingly, faculty play a critical role in student engagement … from the obvious: facilitating discussions in the classroom; to the often overlooked: maximizing those brief encounters we have with students outside of class. This special report features 15 articles that provide perspectives and advice for keeping students actively engaged in learning activities while fostering more meaningful interactions between students and faculty members, and among the students themselves.

For example, in "Student Engagement: Trade-offs and Payoffs" author E Shelley Reid, associate professor at George Mason University, talks about how to craft engagement-focused questions rather than knowledge questions, and explains her willingness to take chances in ceding some control over students' learning.

In "The Truly Participatory Seminar" authors Sarah M. Leupen and Edward H. Burtt, Jr., of Ohio Wesleyan University, outline their solution for ensuring all students in their upper-division seminar course participate in discussion at some level.

In "Reminders for Improving Classroom Discussion" Roben Torosyan, associate director of the Center for Academic Excellence at Fairfield University, offers very specific advice on balancing student voices, reframing discussions, and probing below the surface of group discussions.

And finally, in "Living for the Light Bulb" authors Aaron J. Nurick and David H. Carhart of Bentley College provide tips on setting the stage for that delightful time in class "when the student's entire body says 'Aha! Now I see it!'" Who wouldn't like to see more light bulbs going on more often?

One of the most challenging tasks instructors face is keeping students engaged. ***Building Student Engagement: 15 Strategies for the College Classroom*** will help you meet that challenge while ensuring your classroom is a positive and productive learning environment.

Maryellen Weimer
Editor
The Teaching Professor

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THE Teaching PROFESSOR

Class Participation Evaluated by Peers

Most instructors opt to include class participation in their courses. Many encouraged to participate by some sort of grading scheme. But evaluating individual contributions and promoting a substantive, small task. Consequently, many instructors end up evaluating participation subjectively, relying on an intuitive sense of who spoke, how often, and saying what. Besides worries about the objectivity of such a system, this approach "forces the instructor to adopt two fundamentally incompatible roles simultaneously: the support role of creating learning opportunities in the classroom, and the evaluative role of grading participations every time a student verbalizes his or her thoughts." (p. 24)

Mainkar, the author of the article referenced below, uses this problem and the work of others to identify two more problems that are frequently a part of participation grading schemes. First, students contribute not because they have something to say but because they have some points. They craft these contributions in their minds as other students are speaking. As a result, what they say rarely follows from what has just been said, thereby making the discussion disjointed rather than a series of exchanges that flow in the direction of some logical conclusion. And finally, not all students are equally ready to contribute. For some (frequently those from other cultures or of ethnic minority backgrounds), having to participate in class may cause much stress and anxiety.

Mainkar has developed (and used successfully for four years now) a system that tackles these problems. "Students are the primary evaluators of discussion participation on a daily basis." (p. 24) Here's how the system works. Every day one or two (usually two) students evaluate the contributions of the rest of class (between 20 and 30 other students). They do so using a sheet (a sample of which is included in the article's appendix) that lists all students by name and differentiates contributions into three categories: attendance (awarded for listening and not engaging in disruptive behaviors), straightforward comments (adequate contributions), and insightful comments (superior thinking). One point is awarded for attending but not participating in class, two points for one or two straightforward comments, and three points for three or more straightforward comments. Insightful comments are worth more, but students cannot earn more than three points per day. Evaluators earn three points on the day they evaluate their classmates. Each student evaluates only once during the course. Mainkar has found that the two evaluators' scores agree to a high degree. (Data documenting the extent of agreement is included in the article.) Daily participation scores are averaged and converted into a number between 0 and 100. If a student never participated but attended class regularly, that student would earn 77 out of the 100 points.

Individual differences are accommodated by letting students decide whether their participation grade counts for 10, 15, or 20 percent of their total course grade. Students make this determination about halfway through the semester after they have received adequate feedback, which is provided every few weeks. The system itself is not launched until the third or fourth week of the semester, giving students a chance to feel comfortable in this particular class setting and with the participation system itself.

Mainkar admits that the system does involve more administrative work for the instructor. Students' participation is recorded daily, and those scores must be recorded, averaged, and shared with the students; but given the system's effectiveness at overcoming some fundamental problems associated with the grading of participation, the extra effort seems justified. The article also contains some useful suggestions on how the system can be streamlined and used in smaller classes. It is an interesting approach with many potential adaptations.

Reference: Mainkar, A.V. (2008). A student-empowered system for measuring and weighing participation in class discussion. *Journal of Management Education*, 32 (1), 23-37.

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A MAGNA PUBLICATION

Student Attention Spans

By Maryellen Weimer, Ph.D.

Have you heard that advice about chunking content in 10- to 15-minute blocks because that's about as long as students can attend to material in class? It's a widely touted statistic and given the behaviors indicative of inattentiveness observed in class, most faculty haven't questioned it. But Karen Wilson and James H. Korn did. They got to wondering how researchers made that determination. "What was the dependent measure, and how did researchers measure attention during a lecture without influencing the lecture itself as well as students' attention?" (p. 85)

They began by tracking down the sources, starting with some well-known books that include this attention span statistic. What they found was quite surprising: "It turns out that the research concerned attention only indirectly or not at all and that several frequently cited sources were not empirical studies, but secondary sources or personal observations." (p. 87)

For example, some of the research cited as documenting the statistic looked at how many notes students took throughout a lecture—assuming that fewer notes meant lower levels of attentiveness. But the most recent study in this group found that although the amount of notes did decline across the period, student retention of the material did not.

A number of authors report on the decline in attention based on observation—in some cases, their own, and in others, that of independent judges. In the best of these studies, observers noted a low level of attentiveness at the beginning of the lecture and again sometime between 10 and 18 minutes into the lecture. However, this study suffers from several significant methodological flaws.

Finally, some researchers looked at retention of the material, assuming that if retention is low, students are not paying attention. This research does document that students do not retain a lot of lecture material, between 40 percent and 46 percent in one study. They were tested on content recall immediately after listening to and taking notes on a lecture. But, surprisingly, retention of content was pretty much stable across lecture periods of different lengths.

None of this says that students listen well in class. For most of us, that would be a hard sell. But it does challenge a widely touted statistic. Wilson and Korn don't believe that their inquiry excuses faculty from developing ways to keep students attentive and focused on course content. They also believe that individual differences are relevant when considering how well students are listening. And they think that what students have in their notes is more important than how many of them they are taking.

Reference

Wilson, K. and Korn, J. H. (2007). Attention during lectures: Beyond ten minutes. *Teaching of Psychology*, 34 (2), 85–89.

Dr. Maryellen Weimer is the editor The Teaching Professor, and a professor emerita, teaching and learning, Penn State-Berks.

Student Engagement: Trade-offs and Payoffs

By E. Shelley Reid

I dread the moments when I look out into a classroom and see a collection of blank stares or thumbs clicking on tiny keypads: a pool of disengaged students, despite what I thought was a student-centered activity. Recently, I have been considering how teachers (me specifically) undermine our own efforts to engage students. We do that by putting certain educational goals above getting and keeping students involved. If I sense a lack of energy and involvement on the part of students, right then, I may need to adjust my teaching methods, even if that means sacrificing some other laudable goals. Here are some examples that illustrate what I mean.

Engagement vs. correctness

True enough, students need to be able to produce correct answers. They should know Thomas Jefferson's beliefs about representational government or how to set up a chemical equation. And asking questions is a great way to engage students, particularly the one who's answering the question. But some students may be too shy, unprepared,

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or indifferent to engage with a fact-based question. Plus, once it's answered, no more students need to engage.

We can, however, consciously craft engagement-focused questions rather than knowledge questions. These are true questions to which we don't know the answer, they have multiple "right" answers, and they relate to students' experiences. They may also reveal comprehension or invite critical thinking: What do you think is important for a democracy to survive? Which variable did you consider first in setting up this equation? If necessary, I can give students 30 seconds to jot down an answer or share with a peer before I solicit responses.

Even when I accept all initial answers unreservedly—if I have designed the question well, the answers are all "right" for the students who gave them—I need not abandon correctness. I can then move us into critiquing the field, winnowing toward a "better" answer or a more "academic" response. This process is exactly what I am trying to teach students to do: not to take my word for it but to draw from their own experiences and reason toward a best answer.

Engagement vs. coverage

The need for coverage presents another challenge: we have one class period to cover the Korean War or advanced research strategies, and we don't want to spend the whole period lecturing. Instead, I sometimes find myself pelting wary students with "Socratic" questions. In these situations, it may be both faster and more effective to do a shorter, non-interactive lecture and set aside five minutes for a related activity.

And when I engage students before I present information, I don't lose much speed. I start by asking student groups to pool what they already know about a problem: List three tips for locating scholarly sources. Waiting for students to generate material takes time; I also worry about "the blind leading the blind." Yet students' collective knowledge can be surprisingly extensive. After hearing from students, I know better what I don't need to "cover" and can focus more efficiently on their questions or confusions.

Engagement vs. consistency

We often ask student groups to report to the class, in part to ensure consistency in the learning experience. Wrong answers can be publicly set aside and core concepts reinforced. Yet sometimes, those group reports act on engaged students like ice water on a newly lit fire. Likewise, our task lists for collaborative groups ensure consistent coverage, but speedy groups may still skimp on engagement so that they can sit back and engage with something other than content.

I can set aside consistency in favor of engagement: if my goal is that all students will engage in something for 10 minutes, then I may not need reports. Similarly, I may be able to provide students with more tasks or a larger problem than they can address in the allotted time, and not worry about who has completed what steps. When we move on, I can review questions or collect responses, but I don't need to: I've met my goal of engaging students in the material and can carry that momentum into the next segment of the class.

Engagement vs. control

Making engagement the top priority means ceding some control over students' learning. Despite our ample qualifications to direct the learning endeavor, we also know that during the moments when we are most engaged in learning, we are often least engaged with our formal teachers or with anyone else's plans.

True free writes ("write about anything"), group work with loose guidelines ("talk about what surprised you in last night's reading"), and somewhat random engagement questions ("if you were going to paint a portrait, who would you paint?") may not push students to use concrete language, wrestle with critical concepts, or understand 18th-century European artwork. That makes this the hardest trade for me to make. I need to remind myself that undirected engagement can be highly productive for learners. If I want my students to surprise me and to enjoy making unexpected discoveries—the hallmarks of engaged, lifelong learning—I need to take these chances and trust that the payoffs will be worth the risks.

Getting engaged

When the blahs strike, I try to look for a way to completely—albeit temporarily—abandon correctness, coverage, consistency, or control in favor of getting students engaged. Besides all the good learning that results, I feel a pedagogical rush when my students turn on their brains and produce new knowledge. We all get engaged, and we all move a bit closer to learning "happily ever after."

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What Do Students Think about Active Learning?

By Maryellen Weimer, PhD.

Do students understand why faculty members work so hard to get them engaged with course material? Is it clear to students that involvement and learning (deep, lasting learning, that is) go hand in hand?

One good place to look for answers to these questions might be a required, general education course. And that is precisely the venue Patricia Machemer and Pat Crawford chose in order to study student perceptions of active learning. They replicated their study four times in classes that ranged in size from 125 to 180. Eight different activities were used in this integrated studies course in social and behavioral sciences; five cooperative learning activities (involving group work), two independent active learning activities (students used a Web-based program to prepare for exams, for example) and the traditional lecture (the usual 50 minutes, delivered from behind a podium, enhanced with PowerPoint slides). Students rated these various activities on a five-point scale.

Overall, across the four different classes from which data were collected, students rated traditional lectures significantly higher than cooperative learning activities, and they rated the active learning activities higher than the cooperative learning work. Researchers were surprised by these results. They explain how the course objectives and format were ideally suited for the use of cooperative and active-learning approaches. Despite that, students valued the traditional lectures and active learning activities virtually equally and did not value the cooperative learning activities as highly. When students had to work with others, that diminished the value of the activity in their eyes.

Machemer and Crawford attribute these results to the anonymity that is characteristic of large courses. "Asking students in a large class to learn collaboratively forces them to lose their anonymity. Students may select a large class because they seek a teacher-centered environment, where they can be passive observers and preserve their anonymity." (p. 24) Moreover, students are reluctant to share responsibility for learning with a group. Researchers wonder if the desire not to be involved with others is part of the general perception that general education courses are something students have to get out of the way, that they are a "diversion from their actual plan of study." (p. 27) They are not the courses students take most seriously, not the ones in which they want to expend extra effort.

Supporting these suppositions about attitudes toward general education courses was the finding that students valued any activity (active, cooperative, or traditional) that improved their exam performance. The most highly valued activity of the eight was the exam preparation program, followed by a cooperative learning exam review session.

Do these findings mean that teachers should abandon the use of group work? The researchers point out that this study measured students' perceptions of the value of the activities. That may be quite different from the actual value of the activity as it relates learning outcomes. Students may not always want what is best for their learning. As has been pointed out many times in this publication, sometimes students resist various forms of active learning because they require students to work harder. We think that is the very reason faculty ought to be using them.

Reference: Machemer, P. L., and Crawford, P. (2007). Student perceptions of active learning in a large cross-disciplinary classroom. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 8 (1), 9-30.

Dr. Maryellen Weimer is the editor The Teaching Professor, and a professor emerita, teaching and learning, Penn State-Berks.

Freaks and Brainiacs

By Maryellen Weimer, PhD.

In an essay that covers a range of pedagogical issues, Dale M. Bauer describes the following classroom incident. It's the end of the semester and Professor Bauer is conducting a review discussion. "I end the semester by asking detailed questions about the concepts that inform and unite the books we have read; because I don't give a final exam, this review gives me a chance to bring the nine novels we have read into some kind of dialogue with each other." (p. 159) One particular student is doing an especially able job both in anticipating the questions and then offering good answers. Her best friend in the class good-naturedly calls her a "freak."

For Bauer it was a moment of insight. "Marking oneself

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by knowing the answer made one contemptible, conspicuous, strange—in short, a freak." (p. 159) How different from the days when most professors were in school. Bauer explains, "What used to shame me in school—failing, not knowing the answer—is for more and more students the source of comfort and security, of fitting in." (p. 159)

Bauer explains the current student response this way. Bright, curious, intellectually interested students come to be identified with the professor—that strange person who, in this case, cares intensely about literature, reading, and college. Students need grades, and that makes them reluctant to publicly shame the professor; so they direct their feelings of discomfort against fellow students—those who know the answers and are willing to say them. If students answer articulately too often, they are labeled "brainiacs, the freaks who project how our students see us and from whom they turn away in sometimes mock, sometimes real, horror." (p. 160)

Faculty make themselves vulnerable in the classroom when they show students how much they care about the content and intellectual engagement. They aspire to create classrooms where students will care about academic endeavors as much as they do, but Bauer doesn't think students come to class any longer wanting to be part of this kind of intellectual community. "I see my students walk around campus, wired to their iPods or cell phones, and I am amused, sometimes saddened, by how quaint the outdated community we offer in the classroom must seem. They are connected to their friends, maybe even their family, and we are asking students to leave one community—if only temporarily—and become part of a riskier one based on intellectual commitment and engagement." (pp. 160-1)

Later in the essay, Bauer writes about those students who come to understand, who begin to put things together and consequently reach new levels of understanding. These insights happen to individuals, generally one at a time. "The trick is to turn these individual epiphanies into a collective community." (p. 163) In other words, how does a teacher get that one student to infect others with his or her understanding? This is especially challenging given the anti-intellectualism that may exist among students.

Throughout the essay Bauer explores various notions of failure in the classroom—this isn't the most optimistic piece you'll ever read—and uses experiences and insights to shed light on much of what makes teaching so difficult and draining. "This kind of teaching—playing at failure and challenging students—takes a particular force of pedagogical will. As my anecdote about the student called out for being a freak demonstrates, students now need our will to overcome prescribed passivity and the implicit codes of silence." (p. 168)

Reference: Bauer, D. M. (2007). Another F word: Failure in the classroom. Pedagogy, 7 (2), 157-170.

Dr. Maryellen Weimer is the editor The Teaching Professor, and a professor emerita, teaching and learning, Penn State-Berks.

Participation: Revisiting the Basics

By Maryellen Weimer, PhD.

Student participation in college courses is an instructor expectation in most classes. That doesn't always mean lots of students contribute or that what they say takes class discussions to new heights, but as a strategy that seeks to engage students, the use of participation is widespread. Moreover, recent years have seen a rise in more detailed and explicit criteria being proposed for the assessment of participation. Discussions of the pros and cons of "cold-calling" (soliciting participation from a student who has not volunteered to answer) have appeared in the literature, as well as a variety of strategies and techniques proposing ways to increase the number and quality of student contributions.

In a thoughtful article, Raymond Jones challenges teachers to revisit what they hope to accomplish with participation and then assess whether the way participation is being used accomplishes those goals. He suggests faculty use participation to advance four goals. First, there's accountability. "If we fear that students are not doing the assigned reading and that they are therefore 'unprepared' for class, we might impose a class participation requirement to hold them accountable." (p. 59) However, he doesn't think it's always clear to students what they should be prepared to do in class after having done the reading. He asks the question this way: "Does the assigned reading enable or empower them to accomplish something meaningful in class?" (p. 60)

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Sometimes professors use participation as a means to involve more students. They want to solicit contributions from more than the four or five (or two or three) who regularly participate. One way to accomplish that goal involves asking more questions. Of course, simple, straightforward questions take less time. But if the questions are not necessarily very thought provoking, then student answers mirror the questions. If a simple understanding suffices, then students can be less diligent about their reading or homework. "It behooves us to consider whether there is a trade-off between getting more students talking and the importance of what we have them talking about." (p. 60)

Another intent of participation is to help students recall information. An example might be participation that occurs at the beginning of the period, when teachers try to make connections between the topic for today and content covered previously. Jones doesn't think these question-and-answer exchanges get most students focused on content. How many students actually speak? "In practice this type of discussion involves one student with one idea at a time. What are the majority of students doing and thinking about?"

Finally, some professors use participation intending that students will grapple with ideas. In this case the professor poses a challenging or provocative question and invites students to weigh in on the topic. On good days an exciting exchange may be the result. Students start connecting ideas, arguing with passion, or moving to consider other viewpoints. "But which students actually participated in this heady exchange?" "What evidence do you have about what most students were doing, or how most students were thinking, during this otherwise delightful give-and-take?" (p. 60)

Jones proceeds to revisit a variety of different types of participation, raising the same sort of challenging issues. It's not that he's against participation. He simply wants teachers to analyze whether participation goals are actually being accomplished in practice—to look for what might be contradictions between intentions, means, and results. "We might say we want greater involvement with students, but if it is serial and singular in nature rather than concurrent and integrated, we are limiting rather than expanding involvement and reasoning." (p. 61)

Reference: Jones, R. C. (2008). The "why" of class participation: A question worth asking. *College Teaching*, 56 (1), 59-62.

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Traffic Lights and Participation

By Maryellen Weimer, PhD.

Virtually all of us who work to promote interaction and dialogue in the classroom are interested in strategies that help us facilitate these exchanges. Here's an intriguing set.

Reginald Litz, who teaches business administration courses, positions participation within a set of related activities. First off, students read a case study (the focus of discussion in class) and several supplementary readings. Before class, they write a one-page essay in which they answer one of three study questions about the readings. These essays must be submitted at least 90 minutes before class begins. During those 90 minutes, Litz reviews those essays, looking for insightful and provocative comments that he then uses to start and stimulate discussion in class. Unless the author writes "do not quote," Litz is free to use material from these essays. He acknowledges the author by name unless the student requests on the essay that his or her name not be mentioned.

There are grade implications that accompany each color choice: two points for green cards, one point for yellow, and no points for red.

Before the discussion starts in class, Litz has students convene in groups to share their initial reactions to the case. This helps students "warm up" for the whole class discussion. Litz uses a unique system to let students control how they participate in the class discussion. At the beginning of the course, he gives each student three name

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cards: one red, one yellow, and one green. Students write their names on all three. In any given class session, students select one of the three colors. If they put up the red card, that indicates that they do not wish to be called on. A yellow card means they are willing to contribute but they do not welcome in-depth interrogation by the instructor. Green cards invite "unrestricted in-depth interrogation by the instructor." (p. 368) There are grade implications that accompany each color choice: two points for green cards, one point for yellow, and no points for red. Class begins with Litz quoting from one of the student essays and asking the author to elaborate further on that quote. Others are then invited to join the discussion.

Finally, in this system students prepare a single-page, post-class essay in which they reflect on the class discussion. These essays encourage students (even those not actively participating) to listen to the discussion of the case. Like the other essays, these are due 90 minutes before the next class session, and Litz may read well-written ones at the beginning of the next class.

The obvious liability with a system like this is the work involved in reviewing and grading all the essays. Litz makes this manageable in two ways. First, he uses a pass/fail system on the essays. If the effort is superficial, the student fails. Second, students complete no more than one pre- or post-essay per week. Keeping track of who is responding with what color card also makes more work. Litz expedites this process by soliciting a student volunteer who records the color selected and number of contributions on a seating chart. He also involves students in a determination of the extent of their participation at the end of the course.

For Litz, the goal of these techniques is to "create as positive a learning experience as possible. To that end, I seek to encourage students to reflect upon the material studied and then contribute to the class discussion when they feel ready." (p. 372)

Reference: Litz, R. A. (2003). Red light, green light and other ideas for class participation–intensive courses: Method and implications for business ethics education. *Teaching Business Ethics*, 7 (4), 365-378.

Dr. Maryellen Weimer is the editor The Teaching Professor, and a professor emerita, teaching and learning, Penn State-Berks.

Active Learning: A Perspective from Cognitive Psychology

By Suzanne M. Swiderski, PhD.

In recent years, the phrase active learning has become commonplace across the academic disciplines of higher education. Indeed, most faculty members are familiar with definitions that go something like this: Active learning involves tasks that require students not only to do something, but also to think about what they have done. Moreover, many faculty have already incorporated into their teaching activities associated with active learning, such as interactive lectures, collaborative learning groups, and discussion-related writing tasks.

However, faculty may not be aware that, from the perspective of cognitive psychology, the meaning of active learning is slightly different. According to cognitive psychology, active learning involves the development of cognition, which is achieved by acquiring "organized knowledge structures" and "strategies for remembering, understanding, and solving problems." (This particular definition is from a cognitive psychology text edited by Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, School.) Additionally, active learning entails a process of interpretation, whereby new knowledge is related to prior knowledge and stored in a manner that emphasizes the elaborated meaning of these relationships.

Faculty interested in promoting this cognitively oriented understanding of active learning can do so by familiarizing their students with such cognitive active learning strategies as activating prior knowledge, chunking, and practicing metacognitive awareness.

Activating Prior Knowledge — Students need to determine what they already know about a particular principle so any preconceptions or misconceptions can be corrected before further learning occurs. For example, prior to teaching about the process of photosynthesis, a biology instructor could discuss with students their current understanding of the ways plants gain nutrition. By doing so, the instructor can correct any erroneous information so that students are not attempting to reconcile misinformation with the appro-

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priate information the instructor will shortly present.

Chunking — Students need to be able to group individual pieces of information into larger, more meaningful units, so these "chunks" of information can be remembered and retrieved in an efficient manner. A mathematics instructor, for instance, could help students learn by presenting strategies used to solve problems as groups of integrated steps, with meaningful connections between these steps, rather than as isolated tactics that could be combined in several different ways.

Practicing Metacognitive Awareness — Students need information about their own thinking processes so they can effectively plan, monitor, and evaluate their progress in learning. For example, while teaching a specific Greek epic, a classics instructor could discuss with students where in the text they experienced difficulty and how they resolved that difficulty. By doing so, the instructor encourages students to reflect on the comprehension strategies that they are already using, as well as to learn other useful strategies from their peers.

Faculty interested in promoting active learning should not attempt to incorporate all of these cognitive active learning strategies into their classroom instruction in a single period, or even during a single week, because doing so would likely prove overwhelming and exhausting to students. Rather, they might consider choosing a single strategy, teaching it to students, and then repeatedly requiring the use of it—for in- and out-of-class tasks—throughout a semester. If they provide students with instruction in the strategy and follow that instruction with opportunities for practice and feedback, they will help students make the strategy a natural and automatic part of their learning efforts.

Reference: Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., and Cocking, R. R. (Eds.) 2000. How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, school. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

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When Teachers are 'Present'

By Maryellen Weimer, PhD.

"Without presence, teachers are like guides in a theme park who tell the same joke a dozen times a day. We're there, but we're not there. With presence, teaching lives, it may or may not be good teaching, but it's alive." (p. 215) Jerry Farber makes this observation in the opening paragraphs of a "commentary" on teaching and presence.

Presence, as he defines it, is not poise or confidence but the sense of immediacy, openness, and spontaneity a teacher brings to the classroom. This kind of presence is elusive, easily eroded by repetition. And there's a great deal of repetition and sameness in teaching—the same pieces of literature, fundamental readings, problems, basic concepts, underlying questions, and foundational facts that teachers must get through year after year. A carefully crafted set of questions can lead to a stimulating, provocative, and memorable discussion. But use those same questions four or five times and their intellectual edginess dulls. Farber describes what happens this way, "Questions and answers become merely instruments. We're not really asking and we're not really listening. We're like travelers keeping one eye on the map and another on the clock as the countryside blurs by outside the window." (p. 218)

Even skilled performers do not automatically have presence. Nor is presence presumed by certain techniques or excluded by others. It is not a case of using active learning and abandoning lecture.

Even skilled performers do not automatically have presence. Nor is presence presumed by certain techniques or excluded by others. It is not a case of using active learning and abandoning lecture. "I've had more than enough opportunity to observe (and to hear countless reports of) 'active learning' sessions that are at least as alienating and unproductive as the droning, read-from-

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yellowing-notes lecture that is so often invoked as a foil by the people who give the teaching workshops. The problem, as always, is pedagogical mindlessness." (p. 231) It's not that Farber is against active learning. His point is simply that teachers can be present or absent when using any approach.

Farber's article is really about one of the most challenging (and ignored) aspects of teaching—how to keep it fresh and invigorated over time. "When we're absent, when we're there but not there, this, in effect, excludes the students, who are reduced to the role of mere onlookers (in lecture) or objects to be manipulated (in 'class-centered' activities)." (p. 216)

Is there any way to cultivate this sense of aliveness and vitality in the classroom? Farber suggests three things, none of which involve techniques per se. First, in his experience, he has found presence is more likely if he is unwilling to settle for less. This means he holds "every single class session up to the standard of the best I've been able to achieve." (p. 219)

Second, he recommends being as aware as possible of the people in the room and "how they, collectively and individually, seem to be engaging with what's going on." (p. 219)

And finally, Farber believes presence comes when he stays in touch with his own sources of energy for that day and moment. "Presence demands not only that we take account of those people in the classroom with us at this particular moment, but that we take account of this moment in our own life as well. Presence requires that we find our own energy if we hope for the others in the room to find theirs." (p. 220)

Being present makes us vulnerable. So we wrap ourselves in whatever insulation comes to hand; a formal and forbidding, or even arrogant, manner; an inflexible agenda; a set of props, videos, PowerPoint presentations, whatever, workshop, or other small group activities. . . ." In order to discover these protections that may keep us safe but also prevent presence, Farber suggests we ask of them, "Do they energize the class, give it intensity and focus?" (p. 223)

Reference: Farber, J. (2008). *Teaching and presence. Pedagogy, 8* (2), 215-225.

Dr. Maryellen Weimer is the editor The Teaching Professor, and a professor emerita, teaching and learning, Penn State-Berks.

The Truly Participatory Seminar

By Sarah M. Leupen, PhD. and Edward H. Burtt, Jr.,PhD.

In typical upper-division seminars, each week, one student leads 10 to 15 classmates in a discussion of an important research paper in the field or presents his or her own work to the group. Students not presenting are supposed to participate in the discussion but rarely do, despite professorial queries aimed at generating a lively, provocative exchange. Seminars using this format can be deadly dull. We decided to tackle the problem and would like to share our ideas for more interactive, exciting, and educationally enriched exchanges in seminars.

The most important change we made was to have every student present every week in one of three formats: one

After the paper is available, every student in the seminar must post one or more open-ended questions about the paper on the seminar website at least 48 hours before the class meets.

minute (approximately seven students per week), five minutes (three to four students per week), or 15 minutes (two students per week). In one minute, students present an idea or introduce an organism (we teach biology) that illustrates the topic of the week. Time for questions following the one-minute presentation is unlimited. In five minutes, students are expected to present a more detailed, literature-based perspective on the topic with, again, unlimited time for questions.

The 15-minute category is closest to the "traditional" paper presentation on a designated topic. One week before presentation, each presenter must provide a copy of the paper or post it on the seminar website for the rest of the class and faculty. After the paper is available, every student in the seminar must post one or more open-ended questions about the paper on the seminar website at least 48 hours before the class meets. The student presenter is expected to address these questions in the presentation. After the 15-minute presentation, there is unlimited time

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for questions raised in the seminar. Inevitably, and delightfully, we find that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Without any puppet-string pulling by us, biological themes emerge from each seminar meeting. These flesh out the week's topic and unite the individual presentations.

We enforce time limits stringently, using a bell to warn students when they approach the limit. When the time is up, one of us begins to ring the bell furiously, thereby drowning all conversation. As soon as the student stops, we proceed to questions. We make the bell ringing something of a show, thereby adding enough levity to relax the atmosphere and provide a bit of amusement. Nonetheless, the bell does effectively end the presentation.

The format ensures that all students come prepared and that all participate in the presentations and join in the discussions that follow. We use the number of questions each student asks during the seminar as an additional measure of participation and remind students that the quality of their questions is also a factor.

Finally, instead of writing a paper read only by the instructor, each student prepares a poster for presentation at a general session on the last evening of the seminar. During the first hour of the seminar, half the students stand with their posters while the instructors and half the students wander about listening to each presentation and asking questions. During the second hour, the students switch roles and we repeat the process.

Throughout the semester we emphasize participation by having students post preliminary questions to a seminar website, by having students present something at every meeting of the seminar, and by having all students prepare a poster for public display and open discussion. The result is a lively seminar in which most students ask questions, pose ideas, and actively discuss controversial issues. The effect of having every student present every week is that every student is truly present every week—interested, engaged, with a "stake" in the proceedings. We and our students learn a great deal in these seminars and find that far from dozing through another long and boring paper, our evenings are filled with the excitement of exploring new material, debating important ideas, and finishing ahead of the bell!

Dr. Sarah M. Leupen is an assistant professor and Dr. Edward H. Burtt, Jr a professor in the zoology department at Ohio Wesleyan University.

Student Engagement: A Different Perspective

By Maryellen Weimer, PhD.

The reasons why students need to be involved and engaged when they attend college are well established. Engagement can be the difference between persisting to degree completion and dropping out. Research has sought to identify what makes student involvement more likely. Factors like student-faculty interaction, active and collaborative learning experiences, involvement in extracurricular activities, and residency on campus have all been shown to make a difference.

Stephen Porter doesn't quarrel with any of these findings, but he points out that research has much less frequently analyzed those institutional structures that affect student engagement. The questions of interest to him are paramount to parents (and other payers of educational costs) and of more than passing interest to faculty: Does

> Interestingly, in previous research, institutional size has been shown not to have much of an effect on student engagement. This finding seems counterintuitive: the more people, the less personal contact and the more difficult for students to get connected.

the small size with increased potential for faculty contact available at small liberal arts colleges justify the higher tuitions they charge? Does the emphasis on research and graduate education at the big research universities "come at the expense of" undergraduate education? (p. 522) What about those highly selective colleges—is their pursuit of the absolutely best students justified?

Porter looked for answers to these questions via a variety of different statistical models. These models are explained in detail in the article. They do represent some alternative ways of thinking about and analyzing the relevant factors. Using these methods, Porter did find that "institutional structures do affect student engagement in predictable and

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substantively significant ways." (p. 550) Here are some specific examples.

The theory of peer effects argues that "by attending college with high quality students, a student's behavior and academic performance will be higher than if they attended college with lower quality students." (p. 525) For example, then, students at a highly selective college will spend more time studying because they see how much time fellow students devote to studying. Porter's findings confirm the validity of this theory. "Student outcomes do differ if a student attends Harvard rather than a school with open admissions, and the difference is due to factors other than differences in resources. Peers exert an effect on college students, and we can see that attending school with high ability students will affect how engaged a student is." (p. 551)

Interestingly, in previous research, institutional size has been shown not to have much of an effect on student engagement. This finding seems counterintuitive: the more people, the less personal contact and the more difficult for students to get connected. Porter proposes the opposite: that large institutions offer more "settings" where connections between faculty and students can occur. Large schools offer more activities and have more events happening on campus, thereby increasing the chances students have to connect with others. However, in this case the findings were the opposite of what Porter predicted. "More selective, smaller schools with low student-faculty ratios have higher levels of engagement, as well as schools classified as baccalaureate institutions." (p. 543)

In those universities where faculty do research, it is simply a matter of time. Time spent on research is time not spent connecting with students (particularly undergraduates). Here the finding was predicted, although with an interesting twist. "Doctoral programs have negative effect on student engagement, rather than master's or first-professional programs…. [This] indicates that it is institutional emphasis on research rather than the presence of graduate students that leads to decreased engagement at the undergraduate level." (p. 552)

Reference: Porter, S. R. (2006). Institutional structures and student engagement. Research in Higher Education, 47 (5), 521–558.

Dr. Maryellen Weimer is the editor The Teaching Professor, and a professor emerita, teaching and learning, Penn State-Berks.

Faculty-Student Interactions: The Details

By Maryellen Weimer, PhD.

Research starting in the '70s consistently and repeatedly documents the value of faculty-student interaction, especially when that interaction occurs outside the classroom. These studies tell us that such interactions help students make better career choices, aid students' personal growth, and make it more likely that students will graduate from college. Surprisingly, other than knowing that interaction with faculty benefits students, few details about the nature of those exchanges are known. The research cited below aimed to uncover more about the kind of exchanges that occur between faculty and students.

This study is interesting for a number of reasons. First, these researchers did not use the quantitative methods that are most often used to analyze faculty-student interaction. Rather, they opted for a multimethod qualitative approach that included focus groups, individual interviews, and observations. Also of interest is the site of the study: a residential college within a large public university. In an attempt to cultivate faculty-student exchanges, 40 faculty members agreed to participate in a number of college-wide events such as dinners, teas, lectures, and banquets. To encourage student participation, all of these events were free, but student attendance was not required.

When analyzing the data, the researchers identified five different kinds of faculty-student interactions. Although each type was unique, the interactions were not isolated or unrelated. Rather, the researchers describe them as occurring "along a fluid, contextually influenced continuum." (p. 350) Here are a few details about each type.

Disengagement—In this case, interaction between faculty and students did not occur. "Our study revealed that, despite institutionally established conduits through which interaction could occur, the majority of the students and faculty members were not engaged with one another outside the classroom." (p. 351) Often the interaction did not occur simply because faculty were not present at events. Researchers never observed more then eight of the 40 faculty associates at any of the events designed to promote faculty-student exchanges. Even more surprising,

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when faculty did attend those events, they often interacted with each other and not with students. Researchers observed this at every event they attended. "Even when they were in the same room at events, faculty and students tended not to interact with one another." (p. 352)

This lack of interaction has been confirmed by other research, including the very large National Survey of Students Engagement (NSSE). Of the five benchmarks for effective educational practice, faculty-student interaction occurs less frequently than all but one other benchmark.

Incidental Contact—After no interaction, the second most common type of faculty-student interaction was incidental or unintentional. These are interactions that include polite greetings or maybe a wave of recognition. Researchers use the adjectives "trivial" and "perfunctory" (p. 352) to describe these exchanges. However, even these brief exchanges and the mere presence of faculty members at events were mentioned by students in focus groups, and students described even these short exchanges appreciatively.

Functional Interaction—"Functional interaction occurs for a specific, institutionally related purpose." (p. 353) These were exchanges mostly about academic or intellectual issues. Students frequently initiated this kind of dialog by asking a question. The value of these exchanges was that they frequently led to more interaction. Faculty and students discovered a common interest, or the answer to a first question led to a second question and still more discussion.

Personal Interaction—Typically these personal interactions developed out of the functional exchanges. The outcome was the beginning of a relationship between professor and student. It became personal rather than purely professional. In focus groups, students repeatedly talked about how much these exchanges meant to them. They reported feeling valued and important when a professor invited them to coffee, spoke with them about their interest in their discipline, or just talked about a range of issues related to life. These interactions served to "humanize" professors and students.

Mentoring—This type of interaction was found least often in this study. Using a definition from previous research that proposes the presence of mentoring when the professor provides direct assistance with career and professional development, emotional and psychosocial support, and role modeling (p. 356), researchers in this study found only one faculty-student relationship that qualified as mentoring. Despite the observed absence of mentoring, interviewed faculty frequently described what they did for and with students as such.

The researchers conclude that the most significant finding from their analysis of faculty-student interaction was the lack of it—and interaction was absent "within a well-funded residential college intentionally designed to foster meaningful interactions between students and faculty members outside of class." (p. 357)

This study is helpful in its characterization of the types of faculty-student interaction. It should also motivate all faculty to recommit themselves to interactions with students. In the busyness of faculty life, it is easy to forget just how important and significant even a brief exchange can be for a student.

Reference: Cox, B. E. and Orehovec, E. (2007). Faculty-student interaction outside the classroom: A typology from a residential college. *The Review of Higher Education*, 30 (4), 343-362.

Dr. Maryellen Weimer is the editor The Teaching Professor, and a professor emerita, teaching and learning, Penn State-Berks.

Reminders for Improving Classroom Discussion

By Roben Torosyan, PhD.

Use short, ungraded writing to deepen thinking (and to let people prepare before speaking up):

- Have students write for five minutes, then have them read their writing aloud, or list their main ideas on the board.
- For homework, have students write the questions they have about the reading.
  - o "What are you wondering about? What does this make you think of?"
- Use helpers to free yourself up to notice more discussion dynamics.
  - o Have a volunteer note questions on the board or flip chart (number them for reference).
- Model the life attitude of vulnerably asking questions by wondering aloud, not knowing.

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o Put on the board or in a PowerPoint document a question for which you don't have the answer.

Slow the flow, probe deeper:

Use groups and assign each a different question, problem, or section of reading to report on.

Probe for more meaning by 1) extending wait time,* 2) repeating the question, and 3) asking for more:

o "What did you say, Melanie? Hmm, interesting—why do you think that?"

o "Good. Can you say what your reasoning is?"

Ask people to "say back" the opposing view to the other's satisfaction before they disagree.

In general, use open questions ("what" and "why") over closed questions ("Is this clear?" or "Does that make sense?") to give practice at putting complex ideas into language.

Transfer responsibility away from you to class:

o "Mmm—hmm. What is John getting at?"

o "If you can't hear someone, what can you do?"

o "Others, what does that mean to you?"

*FYI: Most teachers wait less than one second after asking a question. Increasing that wait alone to 5 seconds (counting 1-1000, 2-2000, etc.), students speak up more spontaneously, respond at fuller length, ask better questions and even use evidence more.

Balance students' voices:

"Others we've heard from less?"

"If it's already been said, how would you say it?"

"Whose opinion on this topic would you like to hear?"

Encourage even when off track: "Good, thanks for getting us going," "Yes, more, what else?" and remind people No question is stupid."

Track themes to bring discussion back on track or reframe it:

Put guiding questions or ideas on screen or board, then to move people on: "Which one are we addressing to now?"

Prompt for links: "Wait, what was the connection between this and Jack's question?"

Use evidence to support or challenge ideas: "Do these lines answer Kanisha's question?"

Offer your own dawning discoveries to encourage reframing:

o "Oh, I just realized! Maybe Hector is the real hero of the poem."

o "What if we solved the problem this way?"

Comment explicitly on group dynamics:

"Please, folks, I can't hear her." "Let her finish." "One at a time."

"How many feel we need more structure? How many want more freewheeling discussion?"

"What can we do to encourage those reluctant to contribute to share their thoughts?"

At midterm, email individuals, "I'd really like to hear from you more in class. As your writing shows, others could gain from the greater diversity you'd bring. Participation counts too . . ."

Summarize what was learned (while valuing uncertainty, depending on the content):

"Did you learn anything, or are you left thinking about anything?"

"What struck you?" "What do you want to remember?"

In general, use open questions ("what" and "why") over closed questions ("Is this clear?" or "Does that make sense?") to give practice at putting complex ideas into language.

At end of class, give a "minute paper" or ask for the "muddiest point" and begin the next discussion by reviewing what students wrote about.

Further Reading

Brookfield, S. D., & Preskill, S. (1999). *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Finkel, D. L. (2000). *Teaching with Your Mouth Shut.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Torosyan, R. *From Controversy to Empathic Discourse.* Resources posted at: faculty.fairfield.edu/rtorosyan.

Dr. Roben Torosyan is the associate director of the Center for Academic Excellence at Fairfield University.

Living for the Light Bulb

By Aaron J. Nurick, PhD. and David H. Carhart

We have all experienced it—that moment in the classroom when a student "gets it" and the light bulb goes on. It's that knowing smile or a look of surprise when the student's entire body says "Aha! Now I see it!" It's a response that delights teachers. We know that we have participated in a special moment and wish for more. But the light bulb doesn't go on as often as we would like; epiphanies do not happen on a daily basis. So we would like to explore the ways that teachers can create the conditions and remove the barriers so that more light bulbs go on more often.

In a presentation to the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations, French and Simpson observe that "learning comes from working at the edge between knowing and not-knowing." As teachers we work comfortably in the realm of the known. Our knowledge, amassed through education and research, is codified in textbooks, notes, slides, cases—all of the tools of our trade. Frequently our orientation to teaching is the transfer of that knowledge. We come up with problems to solve, cases to analyze, PowerPoint presentations, and plain old-fashioned lectures to get our ideas across to students.

This model implies that the teacher "knows" and the job is to make the students "know" in the same ways. This model engages students externally. They seek right answers from the text, or memorize the answer or interpretation that the teacher prefers. Several writers have pointed that this process tends to reinforce William Perry's ideas about the dualistic thinking typical of undergraduate students and does not entice them to engage in more complex and creative thinking.

How then might we productively include "not-knowing" in the learning experience? Not-knowing is an uncomfortable experience for both teacher and students. Teachers fear losing control or being rejected as an incompetent teacher or, worse, a bad person. Students fear failing, having their prejudices and ideas challenged, and appearing foolish in front of their peers. Not knowing feels risky and places teachers and students in a position of uncertainty and ambiguity, all of which can serve as a barrier to the light bulb experience. Yet, it is in this very space of not-knowing that the most important and insightful learning can occur.

Setting the stage

Drawing upon the work of the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott, French writes in the *Journal of Management Education* that the teacher's role is to create and maintain an environment that enables learning by serving as a "container" for the anxiety associated with seeking new and unfamiliar knowledge. Such a contained environment facilitates light bulb moments by enabling the teacher and learners to "play" with ideas, to engage in collaborative learning, and to improvise in the moment. Here are some suggestions on creating those kinds of environments.

1. **Being a well-informed, well-prepared source in the chosen subject area.** Although the goal is to generate new and heretofore un-thought ideas, the students need to have confidence in the teacher's command of the content and preparation for class. New ideas are generated from a sound foundation, just as jazz musicians "riff" and improvise within a defined musical structure.
2. **Creating and maintaining proper boundaries for learning.** Paradoxically, students are freer to explore when the boundaries are well defined. The teacher creates boundaries with a detailed syllabus that contains clear learning objectives, requirements for evaluation, rules of engagement, and a comfortable and appropriate physical setting. Class activities such as free writing and small group discussions can also encourage brainstorming and other forms of associative thinking.
3. **Being an open and responsive listener.** Learning at the intersection of knowing and not-knowing releases some powerful emotions even beyond the anxiety discussed above. Through the psychological process of transference, both students and the teacher are subject to projections, fantasies, and a range of feelings associated with the teacher-student authority relationship. Being aware and willing to be empathic and not defensive in relation to the students' (and the teacher's) emotional reactions can deepen the learning experience for all concerned.

How to respond when the light bulb goes on

So conditions are conducive, light bulbs go on—then what? How should a professor respond? Generally it is easy for an instructor to recognize when student A understands the concept. In an ideal world, the entire class will *get it* along with student A and the instructor can move on. But classes are seldom ideal. What if A is the only student who

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gets it? The professor quickly tries to take advantage of this situation. Perhaps he asks student A to explain the concept to the rest of the class, possibly by drawing a picture on the board. Then, as the light bulbs go on for students B and C, the professor asks them to continue leading the discussion.

Once it appears that the entire class has a relatively good grasp of the model, the instructor can incorporate additional levels of knowledge. Clearly the goal is to reach a stage where students are explaining the larger, more realistic applications to other students. In this case the wise instructor lets the "light-bulbers" lead the class, literally "lighting the path" to interactive learning.

The light bulb is an apt metaphor for this kind of sudden understanding and subsequent knowledge building. Light bulb moments occur in those spaces created to be both open yet bounded. They are managed by an active and responsive co-learner, the teacher who operates at the edge between knowing and not-knowing.

Authors' note: A variety of resources have informed our thinking on this topic. If you would like a list of those references, please contact us at Anurick@bentley.edu *or* dcarhart@bentley.edu.

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Academic 'Speed Dating'

By Karen Eifler, PhD.

I don't get nearly enough sessions with my students. What with time for exams and holidays, I get maybe 24 periods to teach them everything necessary for mastering complex content, to attend to their "puzzlements," and to build human relationships with and among them. I need strategies that make every moment count, starting with the norms that encourage interaction. Over the past couple of years, I have borrowed an idea from the outside world—speed dating—and adapted it to help me achieve my important instructional objectives. In my classroom, "academic speed dating" moves students at a brisk clip through several face-to-face conversations with their peers, with each interaction anchored by a prompt that I provide. Let me walk you through how this works on the first day of class.

After my welcome and introductory comments about the course, I ask students to stow their backpacks and to take out a pen or pencil. I tell them that they will not be returning to their possessions for the next half hour or so. Next, I pass out the syllabus and ask them to skim selected pages and note anything they need or would like to know about in more detail. Then, they swivel their chairs or their bodies so that they are facing another student, close enough so that they can use no louder than an "18-inch voice."

I set a timer for two or three minutes, during which they introduce themselves to each other and answer a question I have posted on a PowerPoint slide or announced in my big voice. I craft these prompts ahead of time and alternate questions related specifically to the course and syllabus with lighthearted personal inquiries. For example, "When and where does Professor Eifler hold office hours?" "What is the purpose of the assignment described on page 8 of the syllabus?" "Describe the most unusual or least fun job you have held." and "What is the longest single period of time you have ever spent on Facebook?" Recently, I included in the syllabus a copy of the provocative poem, "Did I Miss Anything?" by Tom Wayman, and I asked pairs to explain in one or two sentences what they think it reveals about my orientation toward their coming to class each day.

When the timer buzzes, I ask a random handful of pairs to share their responses aloud. I think of this as "room-temperature calling" rather than "cold calling," since they have already had an opportunity to try their ideas out on one other person. If a syllabus clarification was made, I ask students to make a note immediately in the margin. They can also ask follow-up questions if necessary. Then I ask one row of students to move down one seat, so that now everyone is talking to a different person; the timer is set for another two to three minutes, introductions are exchanged, and a new question posed, with another round of responses elicited at the buzzer.

With smaller classes, I have set up two concentric circles of chairs ahead of time, but I have also done this activity successfully in large arena classrooms; in that case, it takes a bit more effort in terms of traffic control, but students are familiar with speed dating and know that things move along at a steady clip. Obviously, students with mobility

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limitations need to be accommodated in the activity. Doing so presents opportunities to demonstrate how fluid configurations of learning environments need to be.

"Academic speed dating" ensures that all students read the syllabus and hear it discussed. I love that it is nearly impossible for students to opt out of contributing at least modestly to this activity and that raising questions early on avoids subsequent misunderstandings about course expectations and specific assignments. The practice has virtually eliminated end-of-term claims that "no one ever told me about so-and-so." Equally important, students experience from the beginning the premium I place on active learning and on their participation. I start by establishing this norm from the get-go.

As an indication that something about this works, students themselves now voluntarily suggest prompts for the next iteration. In addition, several have used the format to conduct a thorough and fast-paced review for a recent final exam. They not only posed questions for their peers to answer (and for which they had to search their texts and notes for substantiation), but also created opportunities for students to pose muddy concepts and questions to one another for clarification, in a manner that was both low-threat and engaging. This is an idea I plan to borrow myself in future courses!

Dr. Karen Eifler is an associate professor of education at the University of Portland.

Six Opportunities for Building Student Engagement

By Chris Palmer

To develop a vibrant, productive and memorable course, professors must continually work on building student engagement. Engaged students are enthusiastic to learn and active participants in their own learning.

Below, you'll find suggestions in the following six categories:

I. Syllabus
II. First Classes
III. Classroom Atmosphere
IV. Classroom Specifics
V. Classroom Interactions
VI. Beyond the Classroom.

Some of the suggestions may not work for you because of the size or content of your class. Classroom management strategies must be shaped around the maturity and expectations of the class and the individual teaching style of the professor.

I. THE SYLLABUS

The following ideas for your syllabus may help you set a tone of engagement and excellence right from the start.

Devise specific learning outcomes: In the syllabus, make the learning outcomes as specific and clear as possible, and relate these to the assignments and to your grading metrics. For example, state specific learning goals as well as how you will assess whether the students meet these goals (pop quizzes, tests, discussions, etc).

Describe class format: Describe in your syllabus the class format. For example: "We will strive for class sessions that are lively, engaging, fun, creative and informative. Our format will combine discussion, presentations, guest speakers, case studies, in-class screenings and analysis."

Spell out expected student behavior: Describe in your syllabus the behavior you expect from your students. For example: "Students are expected to come each week prepared to contribute their knowledge and insights. We will all learn from each other. All reading and written assignments must be completed before coming to class, and written assignments must be free of spelling and grammatical errors. There will be extensive peer review and interaction. More than your physical presence is required in class. I am looking for attentiveness, vitality and enthusiasm during class. Participation in class will raise your grades. The give-and-take of information, ideas, insights and feelings is essential to the success of this class. Thoughtful, informed, balanced and candid speech is most helpful, especially when critiquing each other's work."

Describe expected professional behavior: You might even want to go a step further and add a paragraph to your

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syllabus describing the professional behavior you are looking for from your students. For example: "Students are expected to act in a professional manner, meeting deadlines, solving problems, cooperating with classmates, and generally contributing in a positive way to the class. Working in the real world often means searching for solutions in a group context. Teamwork, listening, empathy, enthusiasm, emotional maturity, and consideration of other people's concerns are all essential to success. Please bring these qualities and values with you to class. It is as important to 'practice' these interpersonal skills as it is to learn new intellectual content. Students will be evaluated on their professional demeanor in class."

II. FIRST CLASSES

Learn students' names: Make a serious and obvious effort to learn your students' names within the first one or two classes. Learning students' names and having students learn each other's names creates a warm environment that encourages learning and participation. Use their names when speaking in class. Ask your students to address each other by name, rather than "he" or "she." It makes a big difference in forging bonds between them. Methods to learn names quickly include creating "name tents" placed in front of each student or having your TA take pictures of everyone and create a handout.

Introduce yourself: Many students will be interested in your background and experiences — allow students to ask questions about you [McKeachie 23]. Robert Magnan suggests play "Meet Your Teacher" and distribute the syllabus and relevant handouts, give students time to read everything, then divide the class into groups and have them decide on questions to ask you [Magnan 5]. Some professors include a brief bio in the syllabus to give students a way to talk to parents and friends about the instructor. During the semester, look for opportunities to tell your students more about your professional experiences, relating them to the learning out comes for the course. They can learn from your success and especially from your mistakes. Students should know their professors are human.

Ask students to introduce themselves: During the first class, have students introduce themselves and say something of substance about themselves. For example, a goal they have, or what they plan to do after completing their studies [Chicago Handbook 22]. Or you could have students interview one another and briefly present that other person.

Fill out a questionnaire: Have the students fill out a questionnaire about themselves, including contact information, as well as goals, interests and expectations for the course. Questions might include: Why are you taking this class? What do you hope to learn? What are your career aspirations? Can you give me any hints about teaching and learning strategies that work well for you? What is your greatest hope for yourself in this class? Discuss the students' answers when you meet with them one-on-one. A questionnaire like this helps you know more about your students and shows them you care. If a student doesn't want to answer some of the questions, that's OK, too.

Meet one-on-one with students: Tell your students that they have to meet with you within the first two weeks of the semester. In these meetings, learn more about each student, including their backgrounds, interests and life goals. Make an effort to get to know individual students' interests and concerns and to acknowledge their individuality. For large lectures where the professor cannot meet with everyone individually, invite in groups of three or four, or assign students to meet with a TA or other faculty mentor. There is a line beyond which the conversation might be perceived as prying, so watch out for that.

Learn from your students: Tell your students what you expect to learn from them, not only during class discussions, but also from their research and papers. Students want to feel that their work has the potential to make a valuable contribution. You can also tell your students about a recent time that you learned something from a student.

Establish standard of grading: It is important for students to understand your grading standards. If you build in assignments, quizzes or other gradable events early in the semester, your students can judge your reaction to their work and be better able to meet your standards as the semester progresses.

III. CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE

You want to build an atmosphere of constant engagement, passion and learning. The following suggestions may help you further engage your students during each class.

Convey your passion and enthusiasm for the subject: Your whole body language and voice must convey the message that there is nowhere else you'd rather be. Many professors like to walk among the students, and have their whole body and voice reflect their great fascination with the subject matter. Classes are much more engaging when teachers are moving around and not sitting still or lecturing from a lectern. When students see their professor's

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passion, they want to participate.

Create a welcoming environment: Effective teachers create welcoming classroom environments that motivate students to thrive. They are committed to excellence in teaching. This manifests itself in enthusiasm, responsiveness to students' e-mail and office visits, and willingness to go "beyond the call of duty."

Foster a sense of belonging and respect: Students want to feel as if they belong in the class and that they have friends there. The atmosphere must be inclusive and trusting so students feel their views are heard and valued.

Encourage high performance: Students should take risks, and teachers should challenge students with more work than they think they can handle, encouraging them to develop high-level critical and analytical thinking skills. Demand that your students push themselves further than they normally do.

Promote active engagement: Lecturing may work sometimes, but even dynamic lectures can be tedious for students. Most students learn more when they are actively engaged in their own learning through reacting to lectures with questions and comments, participating in class discussions, and through active learning exercises. [McGlynn 79, 86}

Sit in a circle: For a small class, give the students a sense of community by sitting in a circle. This provokes dialogue and provides space for intentional and respectful engagement.

Make every class writing-intensive: Writing has a major role in student learning and engagement, and in promoting critical thinking and intellectual curiosity. Include a variety of writing assignments throughout the semester, informal and formal, in-class and out-of-class, "thinking" pieces, interpretive essays, research papers, reports and journals. Students not only learn to write, but they also write to learn.

Manage large lecture-based classes: If you have a large lecture-based class where many of the above ideas are irrelevant, you might try the following ideas. Chat informally with students before class and try to learn the names of some students. Set out a box by the door for feedback — questions, thoughts, suggestions, ideas, opinions, commentaries, critiques, etc. Begin or end your lectures with items from the box [Magnum 27]. Announce at the beginning of the lecture that you will ask a student to summarize the lecture at the end of the class. Or less threateningly, have students spend three minutes at the end writing up the main points, or have them write the most important thing they learned [McKeachie 61]. And have students stand up and stretch in the middle of class, no matter what the size. Make eye contact as you lecture and try to make eye contact with each student equally. Don't give the impression of teaching to the front of the room or only to a select group or population of students.

IV. CLASSROOM SPECIFICS

Show up early for class: Showing up early for class allows you to connect with your students. Greet them warmly and engage them in conversation. Arrive meticulously prepared, including having backup plans and extra magic markers or chalk in your pocket.

Take roll: Some professors believe it's the student's responsibility, as an adult, to attend class. There's merit to that argument, but I've found that students are more likely to attend class if they know I take roll. This helps you and the students to learn names and helps build a sense of community.

Start with student summary of last class: Start class by asking a student to summarize the main points from the last class. This provides continuity (and helps students who were absent), and also helps students feel comfortable with oral communication. Let your students know you plan to do this so they can prepare.

Write the plan for the class on board: Write the plan for the class on the board before students arrive. This helps the students know what to expect and encourages participation. Refer back to the plan as the class unfolds. This gives you a chance to recap and answer questions. You don't have to cover everything in the plan. Remain flexible. The goal is to focus on student learning, not necessarily cover every detail in the outline on the board.

Have the students stand up and stretch: Sitting for over two hours (or even 45 minutes) is too much for anyone, so once or twice during the class, ask all your students to stand up and stretch. This helps break things up a bit and keeps them alert.

Play short games: For long classes, occasionally play a short game (sometimes called ice-breakers), especially early in the semester. Such games, which last no more than a few minutes, help students get to know each other. They are a fun break from the intensity of the class and help to build a sense of belonging and community. Students' motivation and desire to learn are increased.

Have field trips as part of the class: Whenever possible, have field trips and excursions. Interacting with students in a non-classroom environment can be more engaging because the students tend to feel more relaxed.

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Invite parents and siblings: Tell your students that if their parents or siblings are ever in town, they are welcome to sit in on the class so they can see what a typical class is like.

Complete the class: At the end of each class, summarize what was accomplished. Reinforce and underscore the two or three key messages or learning points you'd like the students to come away with. Go over the homework due at the start of next class, providing a typed handout, so there is no confusion about what you are requesting. Another idea at the end of the class is to have your students write a "minute paper," asking them "What is the most significant thing you learned today" and "What question is uppermost in your mind at the end of today's class" [Davis 56].

End the class on time: End the class on time to show basic consideration for the value of the students' time.

V. CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS

Make the class interactive: Do everything possible to transform the students from passive observers to active learners. Get the students out of their seats frequently to work in twos or threes on analyzing an issue. Students learn more and retain more when they are actively involved. Working in pairs (dyads) at the start of every class gets everyone engaged, not just the people who raise their hands. Plus, then students share their thoughts with each other first, the class discussion will be of a higher quality.

Call on students constantly to answer questions: Make a habit of calling on individual students by name to answer questions without first asking for volunteers. This keeps the whole class awake and alert. Never go for more than three or four minutes without getting one of the students to speak. You want your students to be on their toes, knowing that you might call on them at any time to answer a question.

Reassure students you will come back to them: If two or more students raise their hands at the same time, reassure those not selected that you won't forget to come back to them for their questions in a moment.

Find a student's strength: If one student is particularly adept at a particular skill set, point it out and have an expectation for the student to be the "expert." This raises the student in the esteem of classmates and encourages the student to stay abreast of the topic. Try to find a dozen students like this in your class for a variety of topics by being specific in your praise. Don't just say, "That was a well-written paper," but indicate exactly what about the ideas, or wording, or structure of the paper you felt made it stand out.

Encourage shy students to speak: Protect the soft-spoken and encourage shy students to speak. Don't allow long-winded or loud students to dominate the classroom discussion. Call on those who don't speak much so everyone is heard from. I had one student who was shy and hated to come to the front of the class to talk. At the same time, she was an excellent student and wanted to overcome her fear of public speaking. I worked out a plan with her to allow her, for the first few times, to present from her seat instead of coming to the front of the class. This helped and she made great progress talking in class. Another idea is to pose a question and give the students a few moments — this allows students to formulate their thoughts before the discussion begins [McKeachie 34].

Listen actively to students during discussions: During discussions, maintain strong eye contact with the student speaking so he/she has your complete attention. Students want to be heard. By nodding, smiling or otherwise acknowledging the student, you show that you are totally committed to listening and understanding what each student has to say. Give critical feedback, but look for ways to compliment the student for the observations so the student feels encouraged. Guide class discussions so they don't wander too far off-mission.

Incorporate peer review: When students make presentations, which they should do frequently, encourage peer review. Get students to teach each other and to learn from each other. It engages them more than the professor doing a solo act.

Do a networking exercise: In some of the early classes in the semester, give students a three-minute "networking" exercise. Before it starts, stress the importance of networking (making contacts and meeting key people) to their careers. Then tell them to stand up, move around the room and find a student they don't know or know very little. Give them an exercise (such as a question relevant to the class or finding out something unique about the person) and then have them report back to the whole class on what they learned from each other.

Ask early for feedback from students: One month into the class (about the 4th or 5th class) ask for feedback. Three possible questions to ask are: What is helping you learn in this class? What is getting in the way of your learning? What are your suggestions for the rest of the semester? Give them a leisurely ten minutes of silence to write their answers. Tell them they are welcome to hand the answers anonymously if they'd prefer. Repeat this

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exercise about two months into the class. It will give you valuable information about what is and is not working, allowing you to change, modify or tweak what you are doing.

Always report back to the class on what you learned from the feedback and the changes you intend to make as a result. Make it clear that you welcome candid and constructive feedback from students and make sure you implement the changes you promise to make. This exercise will empower your students and send the message that you care about how they are doing in the course, and that you are open to making changes for their benefit.

VI. BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

As professors, we impact students not only during classes, but also through office hours, emails, and feedback.

Manage your office hours: For your office hours, encourage students to drop by even if they don't have specific questions. Leave your door open unless you are discussing a personal issue with a student. Have a sign-up sheet on your door so students don't have to wait.

Reach out to students who miss a class: Contact any students who don't show up to class to find out if they need help. One idea: if a student misses a class for any reason, ask that student for a three to five-page analytic paper on a topic related to the missed class, showing that the student can apply the concepts covered in the class to a case or issue.

Be responsive to e-mails and calls from students: Respond promptly (within 24 hours or less) to all student emails and messages. Add your home, office or cell phone number (wherever you prefer to be called) under your name at the end of the e-mail so that students can call you if needed. If you can't fully respond right away, write a brief response saying you will do so in a few days. You may want to keep electronic copies of all e-mails with students and the faculty responses for at least one semester after the class has ended to keep a record in case of any disagreements.

Give plenty of student feedback: Students want rigorous, critical and detailed feedback in a constructive and encouraging manner. Just be sure to criticize the product, and not the person. For example, you might say "This paper misses the point" instead of, "You missed the point." It's also a good idea to ask students to submit short proposals about papers and projects well before the due date and provide extensive feedback on the proposals to make sure the students are on the right track.

Permit homework counter-offers: Let your students take more control of their own learning by allowing them to counter-offer when you give an assignment. For many assignments, this won't be appropriate, but where it is appropriate, allow a student to say to you, "Professor, instead of assignment X, would it be possible for me to devote an equal amount of time, if not more, to assignment Y because this will be more helpful to me in my future career." Note on the syllabus which few assignments this may be permissible.

Call the parents of outstanding students: Toward the end of the semester, select the top half dozen students in your class, and ask their permission to call their parents so you can tell them how well their son or daughter has done in your class. Once the student gives you permission, call their mom and dad and tell them that they can be very proud of their son or daughter for the diligence, creativity and tenacity they have shown in your class. The parents will be delighted to receive this call from you. The downside is that you diminish the notion that students are independent adults, and could even embolden parents to contact you over say, a disputed grade.

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