

## When Doing *Less* for Students May Help Them Learn *More*

If your philosophy includes the notion that students should leave college more independent and self-reliant than when they entered—or if you have ever used the words *entitled* and *students today* in the same sentence—read on.

### **1—Develop (and carefully explain) a communication system that requires students to do assignments in a timely fashion and plan ahead.**

Use email for student questions, student attendance messages to you, and your messages/assignments to the total class. Avoid writing more than a sentence reply. Use class sessions for answering questions, clarifications, and discussion. With this method all students can benefit, you explain it one time, and students don't wait until the last minute to discover their questions.

If you check email only Monday through Thursday, 8 to 5, communicate this, and ask students to plan ahead because you aren't available Sunday night before an exam.

### **2—Suggest steps that students can take to solve academic problems, alerting them to use resources and people and to consider schedules.**

Often these steps mirror what adults do in order to solve *life problems* (such as a broken home appliance):

- review your notes or course text material (read appliance instructional manual)
- check with a classmate (seek advice from your neighbor)
- come to office hours (call Sear's appliance repair department)
- ask the professor in class (schedule a home repair visit)

### **3—Encourage out of class readings with checks at the beginning of class**

Asking students to get their first exposure to course topics out of class not only encourages responsible behavior but also creates a mental set for class. Start with short, high interest readings and give short (3 questions) beginning of class (or online before class) quizzes on key ideas. I prefer to have students assess/score (3-2-1-0) their own and submit.

### **4—Craft student-made rubrics for student-constructed assignments/projects**

Student-constructed projects (e.g., essays, posters, art projects) have essential criteria and performance levels. Bring in a ready-made example project and ask students to determine the essentials (4-6 optimum) and what a *beginning*, *satisfactory*, and *stellar* fulfillment of each criterion would be. Type up as a rubric

[http://www.calstate.edu/itl/sloa/links/using\\_rubrics.shtml](http://www.calstate.edu/itl/sloa/links/using_rubrics.shtml) and distribute, thus providing students

an understanding of (1) the project's essential criteria, (2) the levels of performance, (3) a road map for doing their project, and (4) the assessment tool for self, peer, and teacher evaluation of the final project. If projects are too cumbersome for office-storing, conduct a class sharing session and capture a digital camera image of each project and student instead of collecting.

### **5—Guide students to monitor their own progress on assignments**

Set aside class time to discuss dividing assignments into segments, the steps toward completion of each segment, and a tentative timeline. At a couple critical times throughout the term, discuss (and collect?) *have done* and *have yet to do* lists with students.

### **6—Limit your corrections and lengthy identical feedback on student papers**

When **you** correct students' writing, do **they** truly learn the writing rules or merely copy your edits? If the latter, consider making a hash mark(s) in the margin of a line with error(s) and asking **students to find and correct their own errors**. Another rule of thumb is to **mark only the first 10 mechanical errors in a paper**, and then ask students to correct the remainder and resubmit. For general feedback to the entire class, consider putting only letter codes by errors on individual papers (e.g., *RO* for run-on sentence) and either (1) preparing a page of explanations (codes and the rules) and distributing or (2) giving oral explanations (with examples) as part of a total-class-feedback session.

Submitted by:

Dr. Cynthia Desrochers  
Institute for Teaching and Learning, Faculty Director  
California State University, Office of the Chancellor  
401 Golden Shore, Long Beach, CA 90802  
cdesrochers@calstate.edu