# Welcoming and Supporting Students during Office Hours

## Rationale

Most of us are required to hold regular office hours. Yet how often do students attend? I have often heard faculty say, “I sit in my office week after week and no student ever comes” or “students only come to complain about a grade but never seeks me out to provide support or guidance”. Why is this? Research indicates that factors in student success include faculty who are responsive, supportive and accessible (Kuh et. al., 2010; Tinto, 2012). Students also tend to be more successful when they have a relationship and connection to their faculty member. Interactions during office hours can be one bridge to help build faculty student relationships.

**Suggested practice** to encourage students to attend and ways to support them during office hours:

1. In syllabus, use student-welcoming language to encourage students to come to office hours. An example might include “I am here to support your learning. I encourage you to meet with me when you feel that you need support or assistance”.
2. Include both set office hours and “by appointment” to accommodate students who cannot attend during scheduled time.
3. If you have a large class and have a teaching assistant, you may to have students meet with the TA.
4. For online courses and for students who have difficulty meeting during set times- offer virtual office hours using simple systems such as “Skype” or “Go to Meeting”.
5. Hold your office hours at the Tutoring Center or in other central locations (students may feel intimated to come to your office).
6. Divide the class into groups of 4-5 and assign them a time to come and visit you in your office during the first number of weeks. This can be a short (10 minute) introductory meeting. This may help “break the ice” so they are more comfortable to come back when they need help.
7. Reach out through a personal email/text (in addition to early alerts or faculty feedback systems) to students early in the semester who are struggling and invite them to meet with you.
8. When students do come, stay focused and on task to meet certain goals. Provide them prompts and questions so they can articulate their needs. Remind them of how much time you have for the meeting and give them reminders a few minutes before it is time to leave.
9. Listen for underlying issues. Sometimes students come to see you, indicating that they have an academic question, when in fact, they have a personal issue or concern. Listen and be supportive but know that you are not their therapist or their buddy. Have a list of places to refer them to (Dean of Students, Title IX Coordinator, Counselling Center, etc.)
10. Let them know that if they share certain information about harassment or abuse, you are required to report this to the Title IX coordinator. (in the United States)
11. Sometimes a student will try to monopolize all your time and want to meet with you regularly. Be direct and set boundaries.
12. Although you want to meet privately with your students, be cautious that you do not create a situation that puts you into a compromising position (keep your door ajar, do not meet late at night if no one else is around, if you are concerned ahead of time alert someone in the office).
13. If a student comes in and they are exceedingly angry (pertaining to a grade or other issue) and they begin to yell or make threats, remain calm and state that “you are clearly upset right now and while you are so upset it is not possible to have a productive meeting. You will need to calm down now (take three deep breaths) or else you will have to leave and come back when we can continue the conversation”.
14. Have Kleenex available.
15. Have candy, snacks or coffee available if possible.

Good luck as you build productive relationships with your students.

## References

Kuh, G., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J., Whitt, E. (2010) Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons.

Tinto, V. (2012) Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action. Chicago, Il: University of Chicago Press.

**Developed and Submitted by:**

Judy Ableser

Director, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Oakland University

ableser@oakland.edu