



ANNE'S **BIG** TIPS FOR A GREAT START TO THE YEAR!

1

LEARNING YOUR STUDENTS' NAMES: After introducing yourself and your course, finding out who is in your class is the next logical and very important step! Many faculty believe that knowing each student's name is the key to keeping students engaged, facilitating their learning, and establishing a hospitable climate. If you feel that you are a bit challenged by this, especially with large classes, take heart! And, take a look at the following website for *great tips on learning names*:

<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/teaching/names>

2

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS: Establishing relationships with students is a critical component to learning success, and an added value to being at BU. Many faculty use "student questionnaires" to find out students' previous experiences, current involvements and interests, and ways they learn best. Helping your students get to know each other is a critical component as well. Icebreaker activities (they can be done in the first few weeks) often set a climate of "community and comfort" for students and the instructor. Check out this site for some *great suggestions on a variety of icebreakers*:

<http://www.lcc.edu/cte/resources/teachingettes/icebreakers.aspx>

3

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS' CULTURAL CONTEXT: Finding ways to engage students may begin with learning more about them: Where are they from geographically? What have been the important historical events in their lifetime? What is the cultural context from which they come – both personally and as a generation. Generational differences can influence the habits and expectations students have when they come to college, how they approach learning, and how they view the appropriate roles of teachers and students. What better way to get a pulse on the Class of 2019 than by *checking out the **Beloit College Mindset List!*** Each August since 1998, this list has provided a look at the cultural touchstones that shape the lives of students entering college each fall.

The Mindset List has become an internationally monitored catalog of the changing worldview of each new college generation.

<http://www.beloit.edu/mindset/2019/> NOTE: will be available after August 25th



FINDING OUT YOUR STUDENTS' PRIOR KNOWLEDGE: Students bring both attitudes about and misconceptions of content areas of knowledge with them to courses. Assessing prior knowledge allows instructors to build on or actively counteract assumptions, information, and ways of evaluating evidence that students bring with them. Certainly, conducting a “pre-test” is one possible strategy, but there are other *engaging ways to assess students' prior knowledge* – for example:

http://teachingcommons.depaul.edu/Classroom_Activities/priorknowledge.html



HELPING YOUR STUDENTS SET GOALS: Students who set goals for their learning – beyond “I will make an ‘A’ in this course” – will not only be more successful in their academic life, but will establish a pattern of goal-setting for other aspects of their lives. Faculty can assist students in setting a few specific goals to achieve for the duration of their course. These goals can involve time management, learning strategies, even test taking. Engage students in an initial activity of writing 2-3 specific goals for your course, then have them re-visit these goals at mid-term and at the end of the course. *For more information on goal-setting, check out:*

<http://www.cmu.edu/acadev/fastfact/Academic%20Goals08.pdf>



USING YOUR SYLLABUS AS A TEACHING TOOL: Your course syllabus is more than an instructional guide for your students. It establishes an early connection between the students and you by setting the tone for the course, describing your beliefs about learning and the educational purpose of your content, and acquainting students with the logistics of your course. In effect, it's your contract with students – complete with expectations of students and expectations for your teaching. Unfortunately, many faculty treat their course syllabus as a “necessary evil,” spending little time discussing it with students and

then telling them to “Go home and read it in detail.” In fact, your course syllabus can be an excellent teaching tool and learning resource that provides the path to successful learning. Using it strategically throughout your course helps students formalize the plan you have for their continuous learning. *For more information on using your syllabi as learning resources, check out:*

<http://ww1.facultyfocus.com/eletter/profile/1/48.html>

For excellent suggestions on general syllabus construction, check out:

<http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/syllabus-design/>

NOTE: Make sure you consult your school/department syllabus template and requirements.



MAKING YOUR FIRST CLASS SESSION REALLY COUNT: Just as there is a tendency to skim over your course syllabus on the first day of class, there is also a tendency to dismiss class early after briefly going over course requirements and then addressing any questions (usually there are none!). RESIST THIS TEMPTATION! The first day of class has infinite opportunities for engaging students and heightening their anticipation of what is to come over the next several weeks. Students typically want to learn as much about the nature and scope of the course as possible, which helps them to decide whether they want to remain in the course and, if so, to better anticipate the work requirements for the semester. Students also are curious about the instructor as a person. They want to know if you will be reasonable and fair with them, if you care about them as individuals, and if you care about the course content and their learning. So...give them a first day experience that is memorable, using some of the following recommended activities:

<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/teaching/first-3-weeks>

<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/first-day-of-class-activities-that-create-a-climate-for-learning/>



CLARIFYING EXPECTATIONS FOR THE STUDENTS & THE COURSE

(INCLUDING FOR YOU, THE INSTRUCTOR!): Like sharing popcorn in class? Don't mind electronic devices? Want students to maintain a specific level of attendance?

Clarifying expectations is one of the most critical components to setting a positive climate at the beginning of a course, and continuing that climate for the duration. Successful students know what is expected of them; successful instructors share with students what they (students) can expect from the instructor. However, the key to making both elements work is FOLLOW THROUGH! If an instructor tells students that she doesn't allow use of cellphones, then she must enforce that consistently. If an instructor tells students that he will return papers and assignments promptly within one week, then he must adhere to that intent. Students rely on specific and understandable instructions about assessments, due dates, classroom behaviors, expectations about participation, and any other facet of course logistics. In many instances, listing these course components in the syllabus is not enough – there should be engaged discussion about the expectations and how they can (and should) be interpreted. But, the test is in the weeks that follow. Holding yourself and students accountable is important. Expectations may have to be re-visited frequently. Mid-semester evaluations by students - of the course, the instructor, and their own behaviors - can provide additional feedback about effectiveness. For additional suggestions on expectations, please see:

<http://icoblog.wordpress.com/2012/08/31/setting-expectations-in-the-college-classroom/>



ESTABLISHING A POSITIVE and INCLUSIVE CLIMATE: Did you know that even your syllabus can help (or hinder) your classroom climate through its use of either “warm” or “cold” language? Are you setting a tone of encouragement and success in your classroom, or one of “you must’s” in order to pass? Do you welcome students’ questions and affirm their input? Do you make an attempt to connect with your students, noting their interests as well as their academic performance? Are you available to students, responding to them promptly and opening your door to them? Do you use positive humor to enliven your classroom as well as decrease tension? Do all students feel safe in your classroom – both physically and emotionally? Are you sensitive to students’ cultural backgrounds

and various customs? Do you view diversity as an asset? Do you make assumptions about some students that create more problems than solve them? The climate in a classroom affects student engagement and student success as well as instructor effectiveness. In particular, student incivility can thwart the achievement of the class as a whole, in addition to individual students. To find out more about ways to have a positive and inclusive classroom climate, see:

<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/gsis/f6>

<http://www.cte.cornell.edu/teaching-ideas/building-inclusive-classrooms/classroom-climate.html>

Want to assess your own classroom? Try this classroom climate inventory:

<http://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/teaching/instructional/tools/climate.htm>



KNOW WHAT NOT TO DO: Well...hopefully we won't need this advice, but it never hurts to know the "don't be" as well as the "do be!" All of us make mistakes, or at least wish we might have done a specific thing differently or better. It is helpful (and encouraging) to know that we are checking ourselves and our teaching against specific practices that may be counterproductive for us and our students. Use this as a bit of a quiz to see if any components describe you:

<http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching-resources/effective-practice/teaching-mistakes/>

HAPPY TEACHING AND SUCCESSFUL LEARNING!