Good Practice Encourages Contacts between Students and Faculty

Enhancing student-faculty contact is the first of the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education laid out in Zelda Gamson and Arthur Chickering’s path-breaking 1985 work. Join this session to talk about why it matters, and to learn a number of simple, low cost techniques you can use to build greater connections and foster student engagement. One session will be on September 5 at 4:10 in Peter Engel 269. The other will be on September 6 at 8:10 in Gorecki 120.

Good Practice – Contacts Between Students and Faculty

Sept 5, 6, 2012

Pass out Seven Principles

If you don’t know the story behind these principles, here it is. In 1985 Zelda Gamson and Arthur Chickering were both on the board of the American Association for Higher Education, and looking for ways to promote improvement in teaching and learning. Eventually they decided that it would help if they could develop a statement on the principles of best practice in higher education.

In cooperation with about a dozen of the leading researchers on college teaching, they worked for a couple of years, reviewing the literature and refining their ideas until they came up with the Seven Principles you see here.

Gamson and Chickering certainly aren’t the only people who have come up best practice lists. There are lots of other subsequent modifications, but I still like the original because it is short, clear, rooted in research, and still well respected.

People have done a lot more research on what affects learning since the Seven Principles came out, but they haven’t come up with that much that is new. If you want to check out a more recent effort to pull that research together, check out the 2005 version of How College Affects Students by Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini. (on Seven Principles handout). It is 700 pages of dense social science prose – something to be dipped into if you want something specific, but not read.

Ok, here’s what I would like you to do. Create groups of 3-4. Preferably

with someone you don’t know.

Take a look at the little paragraph explaining principle #1 in the handout,

and then jot down any technique or practice you have used to achieve this goal. Once you have done that, I’ll ask you to share your ideas with your group. Eventually I’ll ask the groups to share their wisdom, and then I’ll throw in some ideas as well.

**Good Practice Encourages Contacts Between Students and Faculty**

What have you done to encourage faculty student contact? What has worked for you?

Get group responses on flip chart.

**Pass out G-C handout on implementation suggestions**

Explain -- these were compiled in 1989, two years after original 7 principles

Stress –

Weren’t saying we need to do all these things -- Just a list of possibilities

What do you think? Any that particularly appeal to you – or that raise your hackles?

**Most important for me is #6 -- Knowing names**

**Several reasons**

Creates a personal connection

Sense we care about them – all studies show caring adult

critical for retention

Makes them more likely to feel a sense of responsibility

If they think I care about them, then they may not want to let

me down by not doing the work

Conversely, if a faculty member doesn’t know who you are,

what difference does it make if you aren’t paying attention or

didn’t prepare for class?

Enables me to praise for good comments, which in turn motivates

them to do more of what I want

Above all – contributes to atmosphere conducive to learning. Research on

the brain shows that negative emotions like fear hinder higher order

thinking. Sense of belonging, on the other hand, helps.

So how do we do this? What kinds of techniques have people found effective? (fill in from there)

**Pass out outline here**

Has to be a priority – can’t say, I’m not good with names and slack off.

Techniques –

Digital camera – individuals, small groups

Mike L – introduction video

Do roll call and practice pronunciation – check to make sure

Have them fill out cards with what they want to be called

Seating chart

Name plates

Learn names by passing out at beg of class

Learn by small group clusters

As you go to small group, return assignments

Have them say name when speak

Mnemonic devices

**Generating connections – beyond knowing names**

Let me suggest a few other ways of encouraging Faculty –student contact that go beyond the Gamson-Chickering list.

Come early, stay late

One – sees role in ten minutes before class like director on cruise ship

Invite announcements

Do quiet, pre/post class acknowledgement of other parts of their lives

-- athletic, drama, music, student govt. (local and student paper)

Remind them you are happy to talk – office hours/appointments

Especially before tests/papers

Let them know if you are willing to talk through beforehand

If manageable, set up office appointments – individual or group.

Required visits, even if very brief, break down psychological barrier to

talking in class

Vince – doing Skype office hours

Come see me notes –

On those who are struggling

Or if a student raises an interesting issue you would like to discuss

Frequent e-mail messages

I often follow up on class discussions by adding something I

thought of later

Postings on class related events on campus or in news

Use moodle to continue class discussion on line – optional or required.

Our students self report a lot of contact with us outside the classroom – almost 60% say they “often” or “very often” talked with faculty outside the classroom.

I must account for a big chunk of the 40% who don’t report that kind of contact, because I don’t have waves of students coming into my office even though I feel like I have always encouraged them to stop by.

I thought I did a good job of pushing the idea that I loved talking about the material we were covering, and I welcomed conversations – in other words, they didn’t need to be struggling to come see me. And, of course, I thought I was warm and welcoming.

Well, you can imagine my shock when a former student I was close to told me that he and his friends had been “too intimidated” to talk with me when they were taking my introductory course. When I asked what I had done to create that response, he said, “well, we thought you were scary smart and we didn’t know what to talk about.”

A while later I was doing my usual early Saturday morning grocery shopping when I ran into one of my students who was working at the store. She looked at me and said “oh, you buy groceries” in a way that made me realize that she had seen me as some kind of disembodied being and she was struggling to process the thought that faculty are humans who eat!

**Together, those experiences pushed me to do a little with item Gamson and Chickering’s #3 – some sharing/self-revelation.**

Previously, I had avoided saying anything about myself – it didn’t seem germane to the course so I couldn’t see the point. I still don’t do very much, but now I try to give them a little sense that I have a life outside the classroom so that maybe they will see me as a real person that they could talk to. This seems even more important as the age gap becomes a chasm, and they figure that I couldn’t possibly connect with them.

Aside from increasing the possibility of out of class conversations, some sharing of who you are also has another potential benefit. The literature on disruptive students suggests that if they think of us as real people, it decreases the chances for rude/hostile behavior.

If we do have a student show up, we have to be careful not to inadvertently mess it up. If we aren’t welcoming, if we ask them to wait while we finish something, we’re sending a counterproductive message. If they show up unannounced at a moment when you can’t accommodate them, make sure you apologize and schedule an appointment.

Keep the start casual. How are you, nice day, are you enjoying your classes – then you can move to “What can I do for you today.”

**As our schools are getting more diverse it seems to me that point 7 – special efforts to reach out to students from a different culture or race – becomes more important.**

I mean, if students who share my racial/cultural background are nervous about approaching me – even though I feel like I send messages about being open – imagine what it is going to be like for someone who doesn’t share my background. Since these students are often the ones who could most use some encouragement/help as they adjust to the new environment, a little effort on our part is particularly important. Just talking with them, making sure we can pronounce their names correctly, learning a little bit about them, making it clear that we are available to answer questions on the material outside class – all these things are important.

**To me, the most important form of student-faculty contact that doesn’t show up on the Gamson-Chickering Inventory is getting feedback during semester rather than waiting until end of year class evaluations.**

Win-win

Lets them express views – really appreciate being asked BEFORE

final evaluations

Allows you to modify course if appropriate or explain reasons

Either way, you look like caring prof

Techniques --

Mid-semester or more often

Informal (classic -- what is working, what isn’t

10 minutes in class or out of class

Critical incident form (modified from Brookfield) **HANDOUT**

Like this cause it really targets specific moments/behaviors; gets

more useful information than I got from general questions

Small Group Instructional Diagnoses.

Technique that provides detailed, structured feedback on how class

is going. There’s a full description at the url on the handout.

I like it for two reasons.

Results show faculty what individual students think, but also

the class consensus on what matters most.

The process also forces students hear the views of others and

discover (sometimes) that their views are not universal.

Contact me if you are interested in having one done.

**Key is not just asking for feedback, but how you respond**

Take 10 minutes at beginning of next class

Thank them; don’t be defensive

Good suggestions – will implement

Places where class divided – how do we resolve

Things I won’t change and WHY.

Classroom observation by third party.

LES set up to do this. Just let me know. Will watch for whatever you want us to watch for. Entirely confidential

**So, in summary, if we work on enhancing contacts between faculty and students, at least three good things will happen –**

**More likely to have out of class conversations**

**More student satisfaction, hence greater retention**

**Better teaching because we know the students better**

**Good Practice Encourages Contacts Between Students and Faculty**

September 5, 6, 2012

Presented by Ken Jones

Gamson and Chickering, Seven Principles for Good Practice

Knowing names

Creates connections

Enhances accountability

Allows praise

Comfortable atmosphere helps learning

Techniques

Digital camera, introduction video

Call roll and practice pronunciation

Cards with what they want to be called

Seating chart and/or name plates

Pass out name plates at beginning of class

Learn by small group clusters

During discussion and returning assignments

Have them say name when speak (benefits whole class)

Mnemonic devices

Generating Contact -- beyond names

General Techniques

Come early, stay late

Announcements

Acknowledgement of other parts of their lives

Remind them you are happy to talk

Help before tests/papers

Office appointments, individual or group

Come see me notes

E-mail updates

Continue class discussion on Moodle

Self Revelation

Humanizing

Enhances approachability, decreases rude/hostile behavior.

Reaching Out to non-majority students

Mid-semester Student Feedback

Students are heard; faculty can modify course if appropriate or explain reasons

Either way, you look like caring professor

Techniques --

Mid-semester or more often

Informal

Critical incident form (Stephen Brookfield)

Small Group Instructional Diagnoses

<http://www.csbsju.edu/Learning-Enhancement/Individual-Assistance.htm>

Key is not just asking, but how you respond

A few minutes in next class

Thank them, don’t be defensive

Will implement suggestions that work

Where class divided, ask how to resolve

Explain what you won’t change and why

Classroom Observation

LES service

You decide focus, results are your property