STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: FROM THE SYLLABUS TO THE FIRST DAY AND BEYOND

August 22, 2019
You Can Do It!

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ON INDEX CARD

1. Question/concern about your course syllabus
2. Question/concern about the first day/week of class
3. Question/concern about engaging students
4. Anything else about teaching at UConn

Think/Pair/Share/Square

*CETL* is here for you!
No Worries!

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THE SYLLABUS ACTS AS A CONTRACT WITH YOUR STUDENTS & ALSO AS AN ENGAGEMENT TOOL

Provides contact information

Presents an overview of the course description, goals and objectives

Lists required materials

Describes the schedule (build in flexibility), assignments, and assessments
  - Academic Calendar
  - Course Workload Estimator

Clarifies policies (including grading criteria) and expectations
  - Including important University Policies

Draws in students and generates excitement and curiosity
  - Accessible Syllabus
  - Culturally Inclusive Teaching and Learning
According to Senate By-Laws (see page 39), syllabi must specify:

- what will be taught
- how it will be taught
- how learning will be assessed
- how grades will be assigned

Attendance cannot be included as part of a course grade.
THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND AT UCONN

At the last University Senate meeting of Spring 2019, an amendment to Section II.E.10 of the Senate By-Laws was passed. This amendment specifies that:

• In-class assessments may not be given during the last week of classes

• Other types of assessments, such as projects or performances, may be due during the last week of classes if stated on the syllabus at the beginning of the semester

• Other types of assessments may also be due during time scheduled for the classes' final exam, as long as this was on the syllabus at the beginning of the semester
CONSIDER A STATEMENT ON SUCCESS

Include language that encourages students to reach out to you for help, adopt a growth mindset, and expect challenges and even setbacks.

Consider providing tips for success from former students or even the teaching and learning literature.

Student Health and Wellness
Academic Achievement Center
Dean of Students Office
Success in this course program depends heavily on your personal health and well-being. Recognize that stress is an expected part of the college experience, and it often can be compounded by unexpected setbacks or life changes outside the classroom. Your teaching assistants and I strongly encourage you to reframe challenges as an unavoidable pathway to success. Reflect on your role in taking care of yourself throughout the semester, before the demands of exams and projects reach their peak. Please feel free to reach out to me about any difficulty you may be having that may impact your performance in your courses or campus life as soon as it occurs and before it becomes too overwhelming. In addition to your academic advisor, I strongly encourage you to contact the many other support services on campus that stand ready to assist you.
Err on the Side of Empathy
INCLUDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Minute Papers
Practice Quizzes
I-Clicker Questions
Muddiest Point
Anonymous Surveys
Convey contractual material—procedures and expectations

…but also

“Convey the excitement, intrigue and wonder that’s inherently part of the content you teach”

Weimer, Maryellen. “What does your syllabus say about you and your course?” Teaching Professor Blog, Faculty Focus. August 24, 2011.
INTRODUCE THE SYLLABUS TO STUDENTS

Review the syllabus early on the course
Consider in-class activities that focus on understanding the syllabus
  • syllabus speed dating
  • syllabus quiz
Post the syllabus on HuskyCT
LOOKING FOR HELP?

TOMORROW: Need another set of eyes on your syllabus? Have questions about designing a rubric? CETL is offering drop-in office hours on Friday, August 23, from 8:00 until 1:00 in Rowe 315. No appointment necessary. Just stop by Rowe 315.

Or email suzanne.lafleur@uconn.edu

UConn’s ecampus syllabus template
DAY ONE! CREATE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

Exchange information
- Introduce yourself
- Start to get to know your students

Consider an ice breaker
- Best & worst classes
- 3 truths and 1 lie
- Scavenger hunt

Teach & model your approach
- Begin to engage students in the course

Go over course information
- Emphasize important goals, objectives and policies
WHAT IS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM?

“What student engagement is central to good teaching. In the engaged classroom, students actively construct understanding by collecting, manipulating, and analyzing information. Research supports the use of a variety of teaching strategies to increase student engagement.”

- ETS
ENGAGEMENT INDICATORS (NSSE)

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WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT ITS IMPORTANCE?

Student engagement in the higher education classroom has been linked to a variety of positive outcomes, including improved critical thinking (Burbach, Matkin, & Fritz, 2004).

Critical thinking abilities and emotional intelligence are associated with grades. In regression analyses, they improved (by 50%) our capacity to account for variability in first semester college grades (Mossler, Lukhard, Gill, & Britner, 2002).
Kanevsky and Keighly (2003) studied the boredom of gifted high school students who had become disengaged in their classrooms. They conclude that learning is the opposite of – and the antidote to – boredom.

Five (interdependent) characteristics distinguished boredom from engagement:
- Control
- Choice
- Challenge
- Complexity
- Caring teachers

When faculty **EXPECT** students to study more and arrange class to this end, students **ARE** more productive.

Students who engage in “**deep**” learning activities report greater educational gains and are more engaged and satisfied.
PEDAGOGICAL TECHNIQUES ASSOCIATED WITH GREATER STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Instructors’ messages of willingness to communicate, inclusion, and appreciation (Mottet, Martin, & Myers, 2004)

Active Learning (Felder, R.M. & Brent, R., 2009)

When in small-group, cooperative learning settings
  - college students were more engaged, did more on-task thinking, perceived the task to be more important, and demonstrated more optimal levels of challenge and skill, relative to the time they spent in a large-group lecture (Peterson & Miller, 2004).
SUGGESTIONS

Build relationships in the classroom
Communicate your passion for learning & for the subject matter
Use humor – if it suits you
Use active learning activities
Prepare extensively – then strive for flexibility amidst structure
Be clear with objectives, and design assignments and exams that reflect students’ knowledge and critical thinking
FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

UConn’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at 860-486-2686 or cetl@uconn.edu

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