

Use Affirming Language

How we speak to our students about course content matters. When we say things like “I know most of this is review for you” it makes some students question if they belong in college. Acknowledge that college courses are challenging and share your own struggles with students about when you were learning the course content. Make sure students know it is okay not to know something and it is okay to struggle.

Make sure that you speak about campus resources positively and not as a last resort. Instead of telling a student who turned in a poorly written paper to go to the writing center, encourage students to go to the writing center the first day class. Advertise tutoring services on day one, so students understand attending is common and not something for people who do not belong in college.

Give your gender pronouns when you introduce yourself so that your students feel comfortable sharing their proper pronouns if needed. This is less about you, and more about making sure our trans and non-binary students feel supported. If you are unsure of preferred pronouns use students’ name and avoid Mr. and Mrs.

Questions to Consider

1. Consider how you speak to students about your course content. Do you tell them it’s easy or do you reassure them that many people find it challenging? Think of ways to change your language around your course content.
2. Have you ever shared a failure with students from when you were in school? Consider sharing with students that you were not always successful – you too had to learn this stuff!
3. Do you tell students on day 1 about campus resources, or do you wait until you think students need help? Consider emphasizing all the ways you and campus can support the student through the course. Including resources on your syllabi and pausing to go over the available resources on day 1, can help normalize these options. Discussing general issues related to food insecurity, veteran status, mental health and disability status can also provide information without singling students out.

Build Community

Having a sense of belonging on campus is a key indicator that students will persist at an institution. Instructors can help by building community in the classroom. This provides an opportunity for students to make connections with peers. It is also a good idea to be part of your classroom community by getting to know your students. Students from underrepresented groups are often less inclined to speak to professors, to complain when they would benefit from doing so, etc. Lessening the stress of these interactions is imperative. A five-minute Zoom check-in one-on-one can go so far to help students gain the cultural capital they may lack.

Ideas for Student-to-Student Connections

- Have students introduce themselves to each other in small groups with a set of guiding questions about themselves and the course content
- Have students get to know their peers through a scavenger hunt. You can make this about getting to know each other for early in the semester and around course content as the semester goes on.

Ideas for Faculty-to-Student Connections

- Meet with students in small groups outside of class
 - Have students sign up for times (and offer a time if those don't work) and ask them questions about themselves and provide tips for succeeding in class. These meetings can be in your office, in the campus dining hall, at a campus coffee shop, or online
- Meet students each week.
 - Select 3-4 students to approach before or after class
 - Say hello and check in. Be prepared to share something about yourself. Some possible questions are:
 - What's your favorite class so far?
 - Have you found a favorite place to eat on campus yet?
 - How is your family coping with you being in college? Are they texting you all the time?
 - How are you coping with Covid-19?
 - For fully online courses you can do this through a personal email

Ideas for full class connections

Try to make a “fun day” if your schedule permits. For example, consider showing one film each semester. This works well on Zoom - students can add comments in the chat if they wish, for example, to make it more interactive. This enables the whole class and instructor to interact. You could also attend a live online event such as a lecture or concert.

Implement Early Low-Stakes Assessments

Assess early. Assess often. It is important that students get comfortable with how they will be assessed in class. Early low-stakes assessments in the first three weeks of the semester can help students prepare for major assessments. These assessments can also help you gauge student progress early and recognize student misconceptions and knowledge gaps quickly and easily.

Short Daily or Weekly Assessments

- Personalized Quiz
 - Consider a one-on-one oral quiz, or have this as an option for students
- Buddy Quizzes/Group Assessment
 - Have students take a quiz independently, then take 10 minutes to meet with a small group to discuss the answers.
- Smaller Chunks
 - Create small quizzes for a larger unit and have students take them every few days.
- Stump the Expert
 - As students enter the class, require them to turn in a 3x5 card with their name and a question on it. Randomly pull from the questions, ask where the student is seated so you can talk directly to them and answer questions for the first few minutes of class. At the end of class, pull a few more questions to answer and wrap up by asking if there's a question that remains unanswered.
 - You can do this online using Zoom chat or a discussion forum in Canvas

Early Mini-Midterm

The early mini-midterm offers students the opportunity to gauge how effective their notetaking and study strategies are for the course and gives insights into exam style and grading expectations.

Reconsider Due Dates

Meeting assignment deadlines can be a struggle for students who work part-or full-time, have children, or take care of a family member. Consider if your deadlines can be extended or more flexible.

Questions to Consider:

- Do you have assignments due at 11:59 pm with no intention of grading them until after 8 am the next day? If so, consider extending the deadline to 30 minutes before you know you will grade.
- Do you have assignments due on a Monday that require a computer? If so, consider campus computer lab times and make sure that all students can access a computer before the deadline. This may require a quick day 1 survey to ask students about their access to technology.
- Consider make up work both with respect to what needs to be completed, and what works for the student—for example, a student who missed three assignments that are worth 5% of the course should dedicate more time to an upcoming quiz that is worth 25% of the grade, even though the assignments are important.
 - Consider 12 short assignments but only 10 are needed for credit. This is a built-in contingency for students who miss class.
- Make your policy clear but be flexible. Each student has their own unique situations and a one-size-fits all policy may not work. Due to the range of responsibilities and challenges students face, it is essential to ensure that students are willing to ask for help when they need it.

Rethink Attendance

Attendance is not about teacher control but about student success! Research indicates that students who attend class regularly are more successful (Crede, Roch, & Kieszczynka, 2010; Schimming, n.d.; Sleigh & Ritzer, n.d.). Class attendance is a better predictor of grades than any other academic performance predictor, including ACT/SAT scores, study habits, and high school GPA (Crede et al.). The act of taking attendance indicates to students that you care about them being in the room and that attendance is important to you. The experience of being called by name as a participant at the start of a group-learning experience increases each students' personal investment in the class process. Many students at UNC express a real value of our small-classroom atmosphere relative to other universities. Being able to call your students by name certainly increases this feeling.

Tracking attendance gets results!

Faculty in UNC's Criminology & Criminal Justice program began tracking attendance and contacting students who missed two classes. CCJ faculty found that this attendance initiative revealed improved retention rates in CRJ 110 and implemented the initiative as department-wide practice. This practice has resulted in a 4-year increase in retention of new transfer students (+23%), new first year students (+12), and an overall retention rate of +7%.

Follow-up with students who miss class.

If a student misses two classes in a row, or is consistently missing classes, email the student in a non-threatening way. For example: *I have noticed that you missed the last two classes and just wanted to check in with you. If you need any kind of help, please get in touch! Coming to class is really important, and we miss you.*

Think Engagement, not Attendance

Attendance is important, but it does not have to be punitive. Students can engage with the course content, participate, and achieve course learning objectives without attending a live or in-person class. So, think, how will your students engage with the course content? This is an important consideration during a pandemic because students may be too ill to attend but can still engage through online asynchronous forums.

You can use low-stakes assessment to track attendance/engagement/participation, so you know who is engaging (attending). You can also use low-stakes assessments as a way for students to participate if they cannot attend an in-person session.

Ask yourself "can students demonstrate engagement with the material through assignments and discussions without attending a live session?" If so, rethink your attendance policy.

Personalize First Day Introductions

Many students, especially those in their first year, want to feel like they know their faculty. It helps build trust, which allows students to feel safe reaching out to faculty when they need help. It also gives them some comfort as they settle into campus life and helps their sense of belonging.

When you introduce yourself on the first day of class give details about you as a person rather than about your professional self. Consider the following:

- Share a favorite moment from the semester. Include who was with you. If you're comfortable, find a way to talk about your family members or other important people in your life.
- Share a recent accomplishment you are proud of (personal, not professional). Maybe it is something small such as finally cooking an omelet without burning it or running a half marathon.
- Share a challenge you're experiencing. Maybe you're training a puppy, trying a new diet, or learning a language.
- Share identities that you feel comfortable sharing, let them know what you have in common—e.g., Bailie shares that she went to Aims, and was in McNair, and grew up in Longmont. Lyda shares that she went to Alabama and loves football. All of these things break down walls with students, who sometimes just come to office hours to say that they went to Aims, too, or are a transfer or first-gen student.

Be Available

Be available to students in a variety of ways so that they can communicate with you in a way they feel comfortable.

Office Hours

Have office hours and discuss with students what these are. Consider calling office hours something more recognizable, such as Chat Time, Open Lab, or Student Hours. Office hours are not familiar to many first-year students. Students may have class during office hours and perhaps addressing alternatives would be helpful.

When setting office hours consider your students' life – they may also work and take care of children so consider offering more options throughout the week.

Let students know that you are in student hours even if they do not come—that you are required to have office hours and that all of their instructors are. This will remind students that they are not interrupting you during this time.

Online Discussion Forums

Set up an open discussion board in Canvas where students can post questions about course concepts and assignments. This is a low-risk way for students to indicate a question. You can set up online synchronous office hours so you can meet with students when you're not on campus.

Things to Consider

- Student life outside of class. Students may also work and take care of children so consider offering more options for them to see you throughout the week
- Offering office hours before or after class (or both) can be helpful for students
- Avoid telling students who need your help how busy you are – this can deter them from seeking your help
- During each class find a moment to encourage students to visit office hours so it becomes common

Conduct Learning Checks Before Moving to New Content

Students who are struggling with concepts will not succeed in class if instructors move forward before they are ready. While students can attend office hours and study sessions to get additional help, instructors can help alleviate students' stress by regularly checking learning before moving on to new content. Learning Checks take minimal time to implement during class but have huge benefits for student success.

Quick In-Class Learning Checks

Red Card/Green Card: Provide a card for each student with a red and green side. Ask students to hold up the red side if they need review and the green side if they are ready to move forward. Gauge the percentage of students with Red cards to determine if you can move on. This also works in Zoom.

Heads Down/Thumbs Up: Have students put their heads down and close their eyes (or just close their eyes) and put a thumb down if they need review and thumbs up if they are ready to move forward. Gauge the percentage of students with thumbs down to determine if you can move on.

Flood the Chat: Have students type into Zoom chat what they need to review or what they do not understand. This will let you see common themes and clarify content before moving on. It also ensures student participation in the online session.

Out-of-Class Learning Checks

Weekly

Course Check-Ins: Each week have students answer questions about their learning to help you determine if review is needed the next week. These can be done on index cards or in Canvas.

Midsemester

Keep/Quit/Start: Hand out an index card (or use Canvas) and ask students to respond to three words – Keep, Quit, Start. Ask them to write one thing they want you to keep doing, one thing they want you to quit doing, and one thing they want you to start doing. This lets students tell you, anonymously, what is helpful and frustrating to them. This lets you see themes, consider if you can or want to make changes, and discuss with students why you do the things you do (note: if there isn't a good reason, and you're frustrating students, consider a change!).

Use Anonymous Grading

This helps with implicit biases, as well as the natural expectations we may gather working with individual students and making assumptions about their abilities.

- Have students submit paper assignments with their names on the back instead of the front or ask them only to put names on the front and turn over the page while you grade.
- On canvas, you can set it to show students by Student ID #. Then, they can submit assignments directly on Canvas without names (or only with ID #). You can toggle back to names when needed but seeing ID#s is quite useful.

Notes from Bailie on anonymous grading:

“I have been surprised, when I see that a student who was struggling improved greatly on an exam. Anonymized grading helps prevent my pre-conceived notion that the student is struggling from cognitive bias that may cause me to grade harshly. It can add a small amount of extra sorting time, and so I do not anonymously grade very small assignments (e.g., 5 pt. engagement activities).”

Build Study Skills Early

Helping students understand how to study in college is crucial to their success. While it may seem as if this is the work of academic advising, it is important for all faculty to support students in building good study skills. For the most part it is not unmotivated students with poor study skills but students whose high schools did not promote learning habits that align with college academics. Faculty can help students figure out how to study effectively much faster and with less stress than if they are left to figure it out on their own. Students coming from high school equate studying with homework, so they must learn that studying in college is a constant.

Here are some ways to help students with study skills:

1. Explain clearly and multiple times in the first couple of weeks the most effective ways to study for your course. This also includes a discussion of how to read materials in your subject area/course.
 - a. Students often do not know how to read academic texts. Build this skill into your syllabus in the first weeks of the semester.
2. Model what a good study guide looks like and how to create one.
 - a. At the end of each week help students come up with key concepts to build a study guide collaboratively. This can live in Canvas and be accessed by all students.
 - b. Keep using the study guides in future semesters and have new students edit and add to previous guides. This is a great way for past students to share study tips with future students (and a good way to practice Open Pedagogy).
3. Consider a Reading Guide that students build collaboratively that can be shared with future classes to build on and improve.
4. Use a “living glossary” of course terms. Students can add to this each semester, add comments or examples, and update definitions.
5. Build review sessions into the syllabus.
6. Help students find study partners.
 - a. Have students write down where they like to study and their best study environment (e.g. library, coffee shop, loud, quiet). Ask students to walk around the room and find peers who have similar habits. Task them with putting 1-3 numbers in their phone or planner and encourage them to reach out to peers for study sessions. For online courses you can do this through a discussion forum.