



Center for Teaching and Learning Newsletter

29 September 2016

Message from the Director



The concept of “safe spaces” has received substantial attention on university campuses of late. These are often defined as places “where anyone can relax and be able to fully express, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or unsafe on account of biological sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural background, religious affiliation, age, or physical or mental ability.” This can sometimes result in the isolation of faculty and students from those who are different from one another and/or those who have different viewpoints. During her recent visit to campus, Dr. Christine Stanley, Vice-President at Texas A&M University, offered an alternative: “courageous spaces.” There, faculty and students might be uncomfortable with what is being discussed or what they hear, but are willing and able to contribute to the dialogue and exchange of ideas. Courageous spaces offer the potential for transformational learning and take advantage of the opportunities that diverse classrooms offer.

Upcoming Events

Faculty and Graduate TA Workshops (12-1pm, RSVP required, lunch provided)

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| Oct 5, MC 2.410 | TA Workshop: Developing Professionalism & Your Teaching Persona |
| Oct 11, JSOM 1.516 | Faculty Workshop: Rubrics for the PhD Oral Defense |
| Nov 2, MC 2.410 | Diversity in the Classroom |
| Nov 7, JSOM 1.516 | Motivation is not Enough: Supporting Students in Developing the Skills for Success |
| Nov 14, MC 2.410 | They Get Younger Every Year! The Challenges of Teaching and Reaching Millennials |

Teaching Tip

Teaching a large class is an exciting challenge. While most instructors feel relatively confident of reaching every student in a class of 30 or even 60, classes of 100, 200, or even 300+ students can seem inevitably impersonal. However, even though conditions that allow anonymity and passivity often exist in large classes, they can be overcome. Divide your photo roster into groups of ten and then use it to learn 10-20 names per week. By the end of the semester, you will know the names of all or almost all of the students in your class. Use active learning strategies such as Think-Pair-Share to get students thinking and talking about course material rather than just passively receiving it. When you use this activity, even if it is once per class, it will allow you to see how students are thinking through a problem. Follow the paired discussion with instructor-led debriefing of the whole class to provide feedback, correct misconceptions, elaborate, re-explain, and connect material they are learning to other concepts.

Research into Practice

Now that you know there is no evidence to support the concept of “learning styles,” what can you do to help students learn? Dan Willingham suggests that utilizing strategies that work with how everyone learns will be more successful than attempting to hyperindividualize our approaches. All students have certain things in common. For example, they need to develop their domain-specific knowledge, they benefit from practice, and they benefit from feedback from a knowledgeable source. Students also all will learn more when study time is distributed rather than massed, when they can practice repeated retrieval (as opposed to review) in those times, and when they are given examples that are both abstract and concrete. See more about these strategies here:

http://www.deansforimpact.org/pdfs/The_Science_of_Learning.pdf.

Reference:

Willingham, D., & Daniel, D. (2012). Teaching to what students have in common. *Educational Leadership*, 69(5), 16-21.

What the Students Say

Students hate exams. At least that’s what faculty members believe, but the truth is much more nuanced. Student recognize the necessity of exams to test learning, but dislike exams that are high-stakes; that is, they fear cases in which the exams are infrequent and count toward a significant portion of the overall grade. Courses that have only a midterm and a final exam, and few or no other methods of assessment, are the ones most open to student criticism. Exam policies most favored by students include (1) practice tests, (2) more frequent, “smaller” exams and quizzes, (3) dropping the lowest exam grade from the final grade calculation, and (4) allowing students to take an exam more than once. Adopting these strategies does not involve capitulating to student demands; research demonstrates that these promote better student performance and indeed enhanced learning.

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