



Center for Teaching and Learning Newsletter

26 October 2016

Message from the Director



By the time that most undergraduate students have reached their sophomore or junior years, they have been accustomed to campus life and academic expectations at UTD. As instructors, we take this for granted, assuming that students are familiar with course management systems, how to think and write in their disciplines, and how to complete assignments. Nevertheless, a significant portion of our undergraduates are transfer students (more than 2,000 this fall), who come from community colleges and four year institutions. They have not taken their core curriculum courses or the disciplinary foundation courses at UTD and might not be prepared for advanced coursework. They will also undergo a learning transformation that is likely to involve higher standards and new procedures, akin to those that freshmen experience. The Office of Student Affairs conducts an orientation for transfer students and this helps ease the transition. Still, some aspects of the transition require time and experience. As instructors and staff, we can play a vital role in that process. Below we offer some perspectives on transfer students and suggest strategies to help them get up to speed.

Upcoming Events

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

- Nov 2, MC 2.410 Diversity in the Classroom, with Dr. Rashaunda Henderson
- Nov 7, JSOM 1.516 Motivation is not Enough: Supporting Students in Developing the Skills for Success
- Nov 14, MC 2.410 Making the Most of Large Classes
- Nov 17, JSOM 2.106 A Town Hall Conversation on the First Year Experience, Dr. Brent Iverson, Dean for the School of Undergraduate Studies, UT Austin (note special time: 11:30-12:45)

Teaching Tip

Tell students to throw away their highlighters and stop reviewing lecture notes before exams. In spite of clear evidence for which learning strategies are effective and which are not (e.g., <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/dunlosky.pdf>), many students do not use strategies for learning that promote higher-order thinking. Resources at <http://www.learningscientists.org/downloadable-materials/> are designed to help students learn how to learn. The six key strategies (spaced practice, retrieval practice, elaboration, interleaving, concrete examples, and dual coding) are explained in detail. PowerPoint slides are available to show students the steps needed for each strategy so they can study alone or in groups.

Research into Practice

In 2014, D’Amico et al. explored the barriers and facilitators faced by transfer students. Transfer students struggle more than traditional students with academic integration (i.e., making connections with faculty) and social integration (i.e., making friends and becoming involved with clubs and organizations). The strongest predictors of returning for a second semester were perceived academic fit and participation in class. This is consistent with previous findings that “it is in the classroom where community college transfers make their connection” (p. 392). These findings suggest that transfer students may be particularly likely to benefit if instructors are explicit and proactive about offers of attention and assistance. You can connect with students on a personal level by welcoming students to your class, by offering encouragement and resources to students who are struggling, and by recognizing students who are succeeding. By doing so, you communicate to transfer students that they are valued in the university community. Encourage students to form study groups, and provide structured opportunities to facilitate student interactions. Doing so is likely to help students give and receive support in ways that will promote their retention and success.

For more on this, see:

D’Amico, M. M., Dika, S. L., Elling, T. W., Algozzine, B., & Ginn, D. J. (2014). Early integration and other outcomes for community college transfer students. *Research in Higher Education, 55*, 370-399.

Townsend, B. K., & Wilson, K. B. (2006). “A hand hold for a little bit”: Factors facilitating the success of community college transfer students to a large research university. *Journal of College Student Development, 47*(4), 439-456.

What the Students Say

In the book *To My Professor: Student Voices for Great College Teaching* (2016), transfer students complained, “We are just thrown in and don’t get half the help that students who start from day one get,” and we are “more vulnerable ... and sometimes that vulnerability lasts throughout [their college careers].” What can instructors do about this to ameliorate the situation? The most effective strategies include providing prompt and effective feedback on student work, especially early in the semester. Encouragement, in the form of helping students understand the need for more effort and more effective learning strategies to meet new expectations, is also effective. The availability of tutoring by graduate students or peer teams can also ease the transition. Indeed, these are good approaches for all students, but they have special impact on transfer students.

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