

# Center for Teaching and Learning

## Newsletter

February 2018



### Message from the Director

Toward the end of a semester, I once asked a student what classes he was taking and one sounded especially interesting based on the subject matter. When I asked him who was teaching it, he could not name the instructor. I suspect that instructor could not name that student either. Connecting with students certainly requires more than knowing each other's names, but that is a starting point. Student letters about award-winning teachers regularly mention how the instructor genuinely cared about her or him. This indicates that there was a connection between the two based on empathy, respect, common interests, and/or other elements. That connection has a number of desirable spillover effects. Students are more motivated to learn, work harder, and participate in class discussions. Not all the benefits accrue to the students – connecting with your students makes your teaching more enjoyable and the impacts that you have on the students more satisfying.

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### Upcoming Events

- 2/22 *Implicit Bias in the Classroom*, co-sponsored with the Multicultural Center
- 3/7 Workshop on *Making the Most of your Office Hours* with Matt Polze
- 3/28 Workshop on *Documenting Teaching Effectiveness*
- 4/11 Lecture and Workshop on *Teaching on the Edge* with Dr. Therese Huston, founding director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Seattle University and author of *Teaching What You Don't Know.*
- 4/26 Teaching Awards Reception for *Center of Teaching & Learning Celebration of Teaching Excellence*

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### Teaching Tip

If you are lonely during your office hours, consider these tips for encouraging students to come see you and for helping students to feel comfortable talking to you:

1. Many students are intimidated by the very idea of talking to a professor or are afraid of being a bother. Consider extending a personal invitation or using class time to invite students and explain how they can benefit from visiting you. The benefits may be different at different points throughout the semester, so you might explain that as well.
2. Keep in mind that some students may have mentally rehearsed what they want to say to you. It can be helpful to allow them to speak first.
3. If students are hesitant to come to your office, you might hold your office hours in a public space or in a reserved classroom.
4. Keith Anliker, of IUPUI, includes a note in his syllabus inviting students to "Walk with Mr. Anliker" at scheduled times once or twice a week.
5. For students whose time on campus is limited due to family or work obligations, consider arranging virtual office hours via Skype or chat.

These are just a few ideas, and you are sure to be able to think of many more. The connections we make with students outside the classroom can have a lasting impact on them, but also can be one of the most fulfilling and satisfying aspects of our profession.

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### Research Into Practice

What aspect of a course can reliably predict student outcomes? There are likely many answers to this question, but one worth noting is professor-student rapport (Wilson et al., 2013). Students' perceptions of connectedness to their professors predict their attitudes, motivation, and learning. This is about more than just caring and likable teachers, however—a teacher can be caring and likable and also completely ineffective, and these qualities are not associated with student learning. What makes the difference for student outcomes is what the teacher does to help students learn. Responses to the following questions were significant predictors of all student outcomes:

1. My professor encourages questions and comments from students.
2. I dislike my professor's class. (reverse scored)
3. My professor makes class enjoyable.
4. I want to take other classes taught by my professor.
5. My professor's body language says, "Don't bother me."
6. I really like to come to class.

For more on this topic, see:

Wilson, J. H., & Ryan, R. G. (2013). Professor-Student Rapport Scale: Six items predict student outcomes. *Teaching of Psychology*, 40(2), 130-133.

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### What the Students Say

Faculty often find that the quietest time to get work done is during their office hours because students rarely visit except perhaps around the times of exams and major assignments. The norm among most students is that visiting a faculty member is something you only do when you have a serious problem (and even then many students will try to solve it on their own or are too embarrassed to ask for help). Faculty members don't want to encourage all their students to come by regularly and "shoot the breeze," but there are ways to make office hours more productive for all. Students indicate that they are more likely to consult with instructors when they need help or have questions if (1) they don't have to see the teaching assistant first, (2) there is flexibility to meet beyond posted times, (3) alternatives to face-to-face meetings exist, such as email or discussion boards, and (4) the instructor provides encouragement, individually and collectively, for students to visit.

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### Teaching Leaders

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