A Holistic Approach to Supporting Students

MAGNA REPORT

About this report

A Holistic Approach to Supporting Students was created to give higher educational professionals, from faculty to administrators, ideas on how to support their institution's students from every angle.

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Chapter One Supporting Students in the Classroom

All articles were selected from *The Teaching Professor* newsletter.

Designing Homework That Enhances Learning

Written by: Maryellen Weimer, PhD

What kind of homework assignments promote learning? We don't need research to confirm that doing homework benefits most (maybe it's all) college students. But there are some vexing issues. If the homework is graded and if those grades count, students will do the homework. But then all that homework must be graded. That can involve a huge time investment for the teacher. So, faculty respond by designing homework assignments that can be graded quickly or aren't graded at all, with students getting credit for completing them, provided the work shows they've made a reasonable effort. Both of those options tend to compromise the amount of learning that results from doing the homework assignment.

A faculty research team tested an interesting homework design feature in multiple sections of an undergraduate educational psychology course. Homework was assigned in every class session, and it consisted of 10 to 12 short-answer essay questions. Even though most of the questions could be answered in two to five sentences, that's enough homework grading to bury most teachers. In one of the experimental conditions, students simply got credit for the percentage of questions answered in each homework assignment—the completion option. In the other, answers to 10 percent of the questions (randomly selected) were graded according to a quality criteria explained in the article. In this option students knew some of their answers would be graded, they just didn't know which answers. The second approach reduced the instructor's grading time by 90 percent. Credit for both assignment options was the same.

Researchers were interested in two questions. "The first goal of the study was to determine if a randomized credit contingency [the second option] would produce higher-quality answers than assessment of all homework items for completion." (p. 65) "The second goal was to see if improvement in the quality of students' homework would indirectly improve their exam performance." (p. 65) And the results confirmed both these hoped-for conclusions. "Setting random-

ized reward contingencies specifically for accuracy of homework produced both significantly higher accuracy and length of homework answers than a reward contingency based on completion of the homework." (p. 73) The randomized answer option was also associated "with modest but significant gains in adjusted exam scores." (p. 73)

In a discussion of how these findings relate to other research, the study authors note that over the past decade, research has identified a number of factors that either contribute to or actually predict exam scores. They list (and reference) homework completion, critical-thinking ability, participation in class discussion, generic vocabulary, and student efficacy. "None of these studies considered separately constitute a dramatic contribution to exam scores, but taken together they provide a relatively extensive picture of what accounts for exam performance." (p. 74)

Completing a homework assignment like this one not only promotes the learning of course content, but it also brings students to class prepared to talk about the content. They can answer questions and add insights, and that makes for richer class discussions.

Design details, even small ones, do make a difference. In this case they encouraged students to prepare longer and more accurate answers to questions about course material, and those answers were associated with better exam scores. And by reducing the number of answers that were graded, this design detail makes giving regular and substantial homework assignments a viable option for faculty members. Would students object to having to prepare answers for which they got no credit? In this case, exam questions were conceptually linked to the homework assignment questions. An example in the article illustrates this connection. If students are shown the relationship between homework questions and those on the exam, that may dampen their objections.

Design details, even small ones, do make a difference.

Reference: Galyon, C. E., Voils, K. L., Blondin, D. A., and Williams, R. L. (2015). The effects of randomized homework contingencies on college students' daily homework and unit exam performance. Innovative Higher Education, 40 (1), 63-77.

Testing That Promotes Learning

Written by: Maryellen Weimer, PhD

Testing has a prominent role in most college courses. It's the method most often used to determine the extent to which students have mastered the material in the course. Say "tests" and thoughts jump immediately to evaluation and grades, with students thinking "stressful" simultaneously or shortly thereafter. What rarely crosses the minds of students and teachers is the power of testing to promote learning. Cynthia J. Brame, Ph.D., and Rachel Biel, CFT in their article, Test-enhanced learning: The potential for testing to promote greater learning in undergraduate science courses, noted that "One of the most consistent findings in cognitive psychology is that testing leads to increased retention more than studying alone does." (p. 1)

Testing, as it's understood by teachers and students, "does not reflect the setting in which the benefits of 'test-enhanced learning' have been experienced. In the experiments done in cognitive science laboratories, the 'testing' was simply a learning activity for students." (p. 9) It was "no stakes" (as in it didn't count in grade calculation) or "low stakes" (as in it counted very little). Brame and Biel think "retrieval practice" might be a more accurate description of the activity involved here.

"One of the most consistent findings in cognitive psychology is that testing leads to increased retention more than studying alone does."

The article highlights research that documents six positive benefits achieved by this kind of testing. They are derived from studies that involved undergraduates "learning educationally relevant materials (e.g., text passages as opposed to word pairs)." (p.1) Here's a brief synopsis of each effect. They are described in much greater detail in the article with highlights from individual studies and an elaborate table.

Repeated retrieval enhances long-term retention in a laboratory setting. When you learn something new, the more times you retrieve the information, the better you remember it. Studies here document that repeated testing (which is all about retrieval) facilitated long-term retention better than studying did. In other words, testing oneself with questions is more effective than just going over the material.

Various testing formats can enhance learning. The questions can be multiple choice; they can be short answer, cued recall, even free recall. Various questions types have been shown to provide significant benefit over study alone.

Feedback enhances the benefits of testing. Simply answering questions did improve performance, but feedback, as in finding out the correct answer, provided an added benefit.

Learning is not limited to rote memory. To some faculty, test-enhanced learning may seem like the kind of testing that encourages students to just memorize material. The authors discuss research here that identifies benefits beyond simple recall, such as being able to transfer knowledge to different domains.

Testing potentiates further study. The case in point here is pretesting and research documenting that it improves students' studying, perhaps by cuing them to focus on key ideas.

The benefits of testing appear to extend to the classroom. All of the research highlighted in support of the previous five benefits was conducted in laboratories. However, there are studies suggesting "the benefits of testing may also extend to the classroom." (p. 8)

The authors conclude with a section that suggests some ways faculty might consider implementing what is known about test-enhanced learning.

More and frequent quizzing. "The studies summarized earlier suggest that providing students the opportunity for retrieval practice—and ideally, providing feedback for the responses—will increase learning of targeted and related material." (p. 10)

Providing "summary points" during a class. This approach encourages retrieval practice by asking students to use their words to recall key or main points at various intervals during a class period and/or at its conclusion. Their summaries could be written in their notes, shared with those nearby, or spoken in class.

Use of pretesting. Testing students' prior knowledge of a subject appears to "prime" them for learning. These tests could be administered at the beginning of a unit or class session or online with a question set that students could be told they will need to be able to answer after learning the material.

Sharing what is known about test-enhanced learning. The recommendation here is to talk with students about this kind of testing, explaining how it has been shown to enhance learning. It will be a new way for students to think about testing, but it's certainly a more positive and less stressful take on the value of test questions and testing experiences.

Kudos to the authors for undertaking this review and putting together an article that makes the findings understandable and useful to practitioners. It's one of those pieces of scholarship prepared for faculty in one discipline that can be used to make teaching more evidence-based in any field.

Reference: Brame, C. J. & Biel, R., (2015). Test-enhanced learning: The potential for testing to promote greater learning in undergraduate science courses. Cell Biology Education—Life Sciences Education, 14 (Summer), 1-12.

Chapter Two Supporting Online Students

All articles were selected from *Online Classroom* newsletter.

Improving Student Motivation with Check-ins

Written by: Alisha Etheredge

Students will naturally start losing motivation in a college course over time. This is an even bigger problem in online courses, where students can easily feel distanced from the instructor and each other. As an instructor, I notice this as a steadily deteriorating quality of student work during the course. But I found that scheduling a check-in near the beginning of the course will reverse the trend.

I like to do the check-in soon after the start, within the first three weeks. This is to show students that I care and to nip any early problems in the bud. The check-in also helps establish a relationship with the student. From this baseline I can then follow up with more messages throughout the course, returning to issues that came up in the first check-in.

I divide my students into two groups for my check-in, those with a course average above 80 percent, and those below 80 percent. For those above 80 percent, I send out a simple email that recognizes their work.

> *Congratulations on a successful start to our course! I didn't want your hard work to go unnoticed. You're doing a great job keeping up with the assignments and actively participating in the discussions. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Remember, I am here to help you throughout our short five weeks together.*

I will also add observations on things that they are doing particularly well and anything that they could still work on. Again, the point is to demonstrate that I am tracking their performance and am here to help.

For the students below 80 percent, I look at what is bringing their grade down. Are they missing an assignment? Is the quality of their work below par? Are they not following assignment instructions, or omitting important components? I then send out a very simple email to those students that might have the following start.

> *Subject: Is Everything OK?*
> *I just wanted to reach out because I noticed that you did not get off to a great start in our course. Although you submitted all your assignments, your performance on them was not as high as it could have been. Please reach out to me if I can be of any assistance. Review my feedback to you on your assignments, and contact me if you have any questions on it. I want you to do well in the course, and I know that you are able to do it. Hang in there!*

After sending the message, I always find that many students open up and let me into their world. They explain why they are not performing well or why they were not able to get an assignment in. The information that they provide allows me to more effectively personalize my future communications with them. Instead of saying, "Why aren't you performing well on your work?" I can say, "I know it's tough taking care of a five-month-old, working full time, and going to school, but I know you can do it. Here are some tips for sneaking in some study time at different points throughout the day."

I have learned that the simple act of demonstrating your concern for students goes a long way.

Students are always very appreciative and let me know that it meant a lot to receive that type of recognition. Here is one such response from a student.

> *Wow!! Thank you!!! That means a lot. You are the first instructor to send something like this. I appreciate the positive encouragement.*

I have learned that the simple act of demonstrating your concern for students goes a long way. It can be easy for instructors to become cynical about student effort and fall into a "time clock" mentality of just going through the course motions. Students pick up on this and react accordingly. A simple check-in will make a world of difference in student performance. Since starting this practice, I find my students are more engaged in the course—posting in the discussions earlier, responding to more of their classmates' posts, and putting more effort into their weekly assignments. And to think … it all starts with a simple email.

Alisha Etheredge is an adjunct professor of chemistry at Strayer University.

Designing Effective Team Projects in Online Courses

Written by: Stephanie Smith Budhai, PhD

Participating in team projects offers students the chance to develop interpersonal communication skills (Figueira & Leal, 2013), build relationships with classmates, and increase the level of collective competencies as each group member brings something different to the group. However, in the online environment where the majority of the work occurs asynchronously, students may resist having to work with others (Smith et al., 2011) on graded assignments. Students often say that they do not like group work because they expect that they will have to contribute more than their teammates or that they will have difficulty scheduling times to meet with other group members. They also may be uneasy about being assigned an individual grade based on the work of the team.

After teaching fully online courses for the past five years, I offer seven best practices for teamwork in online courses:

Intentionally create teams. The best teams are formed when each member can bring something different to the group. Having three leaders may cause tension, as there would be no one willing to be led. At the same time, if there are no leaders present, it may be difficult for the group to form a vision for the project and get the work started. Get to know your online students and their preferences. This can come from a survey or preference inventory or through online discussion boards or other interactive course features. In a traditional class, you would see who the students are sitting next to and engaging with; do the same within the online class. Are there certain people who always respond to each other's discussion board responses? Have you noticed that some people work at the same organization? Get to know your students as much as possible within the online course, and be very intentional in creating teams.

Keep groups small and odd. Every student is very busy with professional and personal obligations, making scheduling to meet as a team difficult. One of the most attractive features of online courses for students is the ability to learn at times most convenient for the individual, without the requirement of being in class at certain times and days each week. The larger the teams, the more complicated scheduling can be. Teams, particularly in online courses where there are no regularly scheduled meetings, should be capped at approximately three students. Having an odd number also eliminates the potential of groups being split when forced to make a decision. I encourage teams to come to a unanimous decision, but this may not always be possible. Having an odd number guarantees that there will always be a majority in the event of a team vote. There will be times when, because of the overall number of students in the class, one group may need to consist of more than three students, but in general, a team of three is more manageable and conducive to best practices in online teamwork.

Set clear expectations for individual contributions. Most assignments have general directions with a rubric explaining how the final product will be assessed. For team projects, it is imperative to go beyond this and identify individual contributions and expectations for each team member. A jigsaw approach could be employed in which the instructor divides the project into equal parts for each group member so all members know exactly what they are expected to do. If the instructor wants each team member to contribute something to the entire project, those expectations should be laid out with a framework to help facilitate that dissemination process.

Create a virtual group space. All learning management systems (LMS) have tools and applications that serve teamwork well. Instructors should create a private virtual space for each team where they can connect with one another and share ideas. At a minimum, the shared virtual team space should include a discussion board, a file sharing area, and a space for live, real-time sessions or chat. Instructors should provide an overview of each feature of the virtual shared space and make suggestions for how it should be used. While this may seem intuitive for instructors, some students may not know how to best leverage the space or use the individual features. This can lead to underutilization of the shared virtual space and a less efficient process during the team project. Be sure that all students know how to access and use the virtual team space to support the team's work.

Monitor online group space. Do not wait for students to email you when issues arise. Make it known that you will be "present" within the virtual space, and consistently offer advice and feedback as the team progresses through the project. It is important to do this in a manner that is not overly intrusive. You are simply guiding the process and making adjustments as needed if the group requires individualized support. This is also helpful for teams who are not able to transparently navigate the process and communicate their needs. Monitoring of the online group space also builds faculty presence within the online course and presents another opportunity to engage with students virtually.

Develop a peer feedback system. The ability to provide and accept constructive feedback is part of being an adult. While this can be difficult and uncomfortable, it is an important part of the team project experience. In online courses especially, develop a template for peer feedback and share it with students prior to the project. The constructs on the template can be based on key interpersonal skills that you are expecting students to exhibit throughout the team project. Peer evaluations benefit students who make contributions (Dingel & Wei, 2014), and can help address students who do not fully participate in the collaborative experience. The knowledge that they will be evaluated by peers can motivate students to work more collaboratively with their team members.

Assign individual and team grades. It is important to assign both individual and team grades for the team assignments. Students should be assessed on the individual contributions they made as well as on how well they participate in the team components. Assigning individual grades requires a clear expectation for individual contributions and progress monitoring throughout the

project. Assigning individual grades increases individual accountability and can make for a more positive collaborative experience.

Instead of eliminating effective pedagogical techniques present in traditional courses, such as team projects, online instructors must leverage technologies and best practices to include equal learning opportunities for students in online courses.

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Stephanie Smith Budhai is an assistant professor of education at Neumann University.

Chapter Three Supporting Students as an Academic Leader

All articles were selected from *Academic Leader* newsletter.

A Comprehensive Approach to Student Success

Written by: Rob Kelly

Florida International University (FIU) is in the process of developing a comprehensive student retention effort with the central theme that if you get students into their majors early and provide them a clear path, they will be more likely to graduate in four years.

The problem

FIU is an urban, public, research university with an enrollment of 44,000 students, 61 percent of whom are Hispanic. FIU is a leader in on-time graduation of Hispanic students, but at 46 percent its overall on-time graduation rate is significantly lower than the 54 percent national average for similar institutions.

Early retention rates are good, and once students are in their majors, their on-time graduate rates are good as well. But some students are getting off course somewhere in between. Why?

"We're not getting them into appropriate majors," says Doug Robertson, FIU's dean of undergraduate education and a professor of higher education. He places much of the blame on the "two-plus-two" model in which students explore their academic options during their first two years of college and only after that exploration choose a discipline and take courses in that major.

"The myth that it's good for students to explore for two years—that they take general education courses and somehow experience different disciplinary perspectives and from that experience arrive at a major—is obviously just a failed vision. It doesn't match reality. Students experience the general education curriculum as disorganized. They don't understand it. It's a hoop to get through. They are self-advising by and large. They are allowed to persist, exploring but not learn-

ing from their explorations. And the idea that they come out of the first two years with the vision of the major just isn't happening here," Robertson says.

Until recently, 20 percent of FIU undergraduates had earned more than 60 credits but were not enrolled in a major. "We had nearly 6,000 students out there basically lost. That's the nature of the problem we had to solve," Robertson says.

Getting students on track

"There is a variety of data that strongly suggests that if you can help students identify an appropriate major—one that matches their interests, goals, and strengths—early, they tend to succeed and graduate on time at a much higher rate."

To help make that happen, FIU will require students to select a major before enrolling, whether they are first-year or transfer students. To make this an informed choice, the university will provide academic advising and career development before admission. "We're building some fairly sophisticated technologies that allow the students to do career interest inventories that link their interests to specific FIU majors," Robertson says.

FIU has also created a Web page where students can click on a major and view a brief program description, admission requirements, job opportunities, and contact information. There's also a tool called a major map, a semester-by-semester path to success in that particular major.

For those who are unsure of which major to choose, there is an "exploratory" major that guides students through a specific curriculum with the goal of having them select a major within their first 45 credits.

Another benefit of this technology is the ability to know more precisely the demand for each course, which will help departments allocate resources to meet demand. "We're going to a system of prefunding the deans based on empirical projections of how many students are going to be taking which classes if they stay on their major maps. It should eliminate the problem of students having to wait a whole year for a course to come around because it was full, and we couldn't afford to add another section. We're basically moving to a system where we enter into a compact with the students that says, basically, 'If you stay on track, we'll make sure that the classes on that track are offered," Robertson says.

Tracking tool

Another piece of technology will provide tracking information for each of FIU's 65 undergraduate majors. If a student does not meet a particular milestone, the system will alert the student's advisor who will meet with that student to address the issue. These alerts can come about as a result of not taking a course at the correct time or underperforming in certain key areas. For example, if an engineering major does not take a particular calculus course or does poorly, an alert is sent to the student's advisor, who follows up with the student.

The system will also provide the student with the same information that the advisor gets (except for certain sensitive information related to security), "so that they are doing self advising, which helps them mature and make decisions," Robertson says.

Another important aspect of this tracking feature is the ability to provide "universal advising." If a student meets with an advisor, the advisor can take notes about the conversation and enter it into a field within the system. The student and the advisor can see it, which will eliminate the problem of selective memory and provide consistency over time if the student works with a different advisor in the future.

Institutional research

FIU's office of institutional research is conducting multivariate factor analyses to determine which factors correlate with on-time graduation. This research will provide advisors indicators that can help them provide timely and effective interventions. For example, one study has found that if a journalism major earns a grade lower than an A in a first-year composition course, his or her chances of graduating on time is 18 percent. Based on this information, an advisor may encourage the student to take other writing courses to improve his or her chances for on-time graduation.

Advisors

In addition to technology and better data to help guide students and advisors, FIU has committed to moving to a professional advising model and to hiring enough advisors to achieve a 300-to-1 student-advisor ratio. "We're attacking the idea that academic advising is something that anybody can do," Robertson says.

Dean and chair evaluation

Under FIU's new system, deans and chairs will be evaluated on their success in retention and graduation goals. "We're taking the retention and graduation goals and infusing them into all the units and having those units held accountable," Robertson says.

Deans will be evaluated on two measures:

1. the retention and graduation rates of the students who enrolled in their colleges and stayed
2. the success of students who were admitted into their colleges but later switched to other colleges within the university.

"We want to make sure that students not doing well in a particular college can transition to an appropriate choice. If a student says, 'I don't want to be in business anymore,' rather than replying, 'OK, see you later,' we'd like the deans to say, 'OK, let's talk. Let's figure out where you should be and get you situated so you can succeed,'" Robertson says.
Chapter Three – Supporting Students as an Academic Leader

Implementing High-Impact Learning

Written by: Rob Kelly

High-impact learning practices—first-year seminars, learning communities, service-learning, undergraduate research, and capstone experiences—can provide intensive learning for students and improve retention, persistence to degree, and postgraduate attainment. However, to be effective, institutions need high-level support and cross-divisional collaboration, says Lynn E. Swaner, a higher education consultant and coauthor (with Jayne E. Brownell) of *Five High-Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion, and Quality* (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2010). In a recent interview, Swaner talked about her research and offered suggestions on successfully implementing these practices.

Of these practices, service-learning and learning communities are the most common and have the largest empirical base of knowledge about them.

"The term 'high impact' [in regard to practices] comes from George Kuh's work with NSSE [National Survey of Student Engagement]. They are particularly beneficial for students in terms of academic and personal growth, career development, and a wide range of desired learning outcomes. There's something unique about these practices. They seem to have a greater impact than what we're used to," Swaner says. "They tend to be very intense, not simply students walking into a lecture hall and hearing a lecture but students [being required] to learn on multiple levels. They're creating new knowledge, implementing it in real-life settings, and reflecting on the implications for themselves and the community."

Of these practices, service-learning and learning communities are the most common and have the largest empirical base of knowledge about them. All these practices cross-disciplinary boundaries, and participation is usually voluntary. Students who participate in these learning opportunities do so only once or twice in their college careers. "I believe [these practices] are beginning to move from the periphery a little closer to the heart of the academic mission. Still, I would characterize them as innovative practices and not the norm," Swaner says.

Identifying high-impact practices that fit the institution's mission

Based on her research of several institutions across the United States that have successfully implemented these high-impact learning practices, Swaner recommends that departments and institutions conduct research, join networks that have expertise in these practices, and conduct

a needs assessment. "Get a sense of the benefits of these practices, what it actually means to engage students in their learning, the kind of outcomes you're looking for, and then do a needs assessment of your own institution. What would be realistic?"

Another critical component is involving a broad array of stakeholders. A cross-constituency group should include people from academic affairs, student affairs, and community members (in the case of service-learning). "If you have as many stakeholders as you can at the table, I think it will enrich the planning process. It will also generate buy-in for this concept," Swaner says.
This collaboration typically involves several representatives from academic affairs, several from student affairs, and a few key faculty members. In the case of service-learning, there would be two or three organization representatives who would be really engaged in this. The committee discusses questions such as "What is our mission? What are the learning outcomes we want to see from our students? What types of activities do we have going on? How can we build in more of these high-impact practices?"

"Once you start asking those questions, you start identifying resources and opportunities and challenges, and it's that collaborative process that leads to a lot of answers. The committee or a working group will start to write grant proposals or start to look for resources and then that body of people also starts to attend conferences and network with other colleges and universities. It's really critical to assemble that cross-constituency team or else you end up with faculty doing these things in isolation. You have student affairs people doing things in isolation, which is tremendous and impactful on students but not as successful as it could be for the entire institution."

Support: Top down, bottom up, inside, and out

Support from key players on and off campus is also essential. "Institutions are under a lot of financial stress. At the same time, they're trying to do a lot of innovative things, so I think it's critical, particularly for an academic leader to really look beyond his or her own resources. Look to the institution. Is there a teaching and learning initiative? Are there institutional grants available? Are there outside grants to take a look at? If you want to do something that's innovative and less costly, then you're really going to have to look beyond your own means and pull in different people and different resources to make it happen," Swaner says, adding that successful high-impact initiatives have support from the academic vice president or president.

Although support from top administrators is essential to making high-impact practices succeed, the practices cannot be imposed on a department or individual faculty members. "On the campuses I visited, initiation of these practices tended to be a hybrid of bottom up and top down. So you find interest at the academic administrative level and you find interest at the individual faculty member level, and then there's sort of a meeting in the middle, asking, 'What will it take to accomplish this?' What I found is that institutions where it's more of a grassroots effort and it's just the faculty, it sometimes is not as successful," Swaner says.

Because of the additional work involved in preparing and executing these learning experiences, faculty would benefit from release time from courses or other responsibilities and special consideration in the tenure and promotion process. "[High-impact practices] may be valued in some fields and on some campuses and not in others. On campuses where you have that administrative support and the administrators say, 'We want to see our students engage in these types of experiences, then you will see them allocating the resources and allocating the priorities that enable faculty to better participate in them."

The student experience

For the general student population, there are many positive effects, such as improvement in retention, persistence to degree, and postgraduation attainment. The effects of high-impact practices on underserved students is generally positive as well; however, there has not been much research on how these practices affect this population, Swaner says, adding that there are often barriers that can inhibit underserved students' participation. For example, socioeconomically disadvantaged students often need to work and might not have the time to participate in a service-learning opportunity that requires a commitment of 20 hours a week.

Swaner found that service-learning in particular poses other challenges as well. Some students from underserved populations might find themselves working on a project that serves members of their own communities, which means that educators need to provide an orientation and philosophy of the program that is sensitive to the needs and experiences of these students. (For example, is the program philanthropic, communitarian, or empowering?)

Students respond positively to high-impact practices, Swaner says, but they do pose additional challenges. "Students find them to be worthwhile and connected to their lives. These experiences help give them direction and skills for career choice. Obviously this is not the only goal, but it is a goal of students. One negative piece about it, and this speaks to the intensity of these experiences, is that students report that [high-impact practices] are a tremendous amount of work, that it's eating up a lot of their time and energy and effort," Swaner says.

In addition, the intensity of these high-impact practices can make other learning experiences disappointing. "It almost makes the rest of their college experience difficult for them because it sets the bar so high in terms of what their engagement should be, and then if they don't have another high-impact experience, they express disappointment that they weren't able to continue that type of intense learning experience. That's one of the main reasons [to think] about ways to integrate it across curriculum, across departments."

Assessment

Assessment is an important part of understanding the effects of high-impact practices. "Once you get all those folks around the table, you kind of have to develop a common language for your institution. Student affairs folks may talk about learning in one way, and faculty members may talk about it in another way. But they start to craft a common language and begin to understand

what each other is saying. For example, what does it mean for a student to develop critical thinking? That might mean different things to different people. In terms of assessment and evaluation, colleges and universities that are at the beginning of this process are in a good place because they have that opportunity to build in assessment and evaluation as they start these programs," Swaner says.

Swaner suggests tapping into the following resources to assess these practices: the institutional research office and faculty members with educational research experience. "Departments should really be looking to partner with institutional research offices because that is sort of the clearinghouse of data. Those folks are very knowledgeable about how to do research related to their students in the programs that exist. There are some schools that are already participating in NSSE, and there are other surveys as well. There may be data there, so partnering with the IR office is key," Swaner says.

If your campus has a school of education, there are likely a substantial number of faculty who have experience with educational research and are looking to do meaningful projects. "Pulling those folks into a cross-constituency team can really make a difference in terms of what you're able to evaluate and whether you're able to tell if you're effective or not. They can also help you tie your findings to the larger picture."

Chapter Four Supporting Students in Distance Education Programs

All articles were selected from *Distance Education Report* newsletter.

How Teaching Load, Employment Status Effect Student Performance

By Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti, M.S.

Some years ago, Witt Salley, EdD, director of online education at Clemson University, was working for a community college in Missouri. The college had a growing online presence, and it was handling this demand by allowing faculty who were willing to teach online to do so as an overload. This policy made online instruction very attractive to the faculty and allowed the institution to meet its growing demand.

Unfortunately, some of the students were beginning to suffer. "Assignments were going ungraded and discussion boards were ignored," says Melanie Shaw, PhD, online faculty success coordinator at Clemson and Witt's partner on a research study about employment status, teaching load, and student performance. She notes that the college's attempts to address the problem brought mixed results.

The college hired adjunct faculty to teach online to lighten the load on full-time faculty, but the full-time faculty responded negatively, citing concerns about the quality of instruction from the adjuncts. "They needed to reconcile multiple voices," Shaw says. So Witt undertook the study to examine how faculty workload and status impacted student success. The results shed some light on this important issue.

Study results

The research study looked at three issues, according to the abstract of Shaw and Witt's presentation on the topic at the Online Learning Consortium International Conference 2015:

1. Online instructors in the local setting are overextended and are consequently unable to implement best practices. Because overextended online instructors cannot offer the presence and feedback needed to promote success, online student performance as measured by final course grades suffers.

2. The current institutional system encourages overload teaching assignments.

3. Increased teaching loads can have negative ramifications for online instructor attentiveness, student performance, and academic rigor.

The first research question looked at students' final course grades in online courses taught by full-time faculty versus adjuncts. It found that student performance was unrelated to faculty employment status. This held true both for percentage of students completing the courses and percentage of students earning an A, B, or C grade.

The second research question looked at student performance by number of online credit hours taught by full-time instructors. In this case, the number of online credit hours taught by the full-time faculty correlated negatively with student performance as measured both by course completion and percentage of A, B, and C grades.

The third research question looked at student performance, as measured by course completion and final course grades, and how it correlates with number of hours taught by adjunct instructors. In this case, the workload was negatively related to course completion but did not impact the percentage of students receiving an A, B, or C grade.

Finally, the last research question looked at how the number of overload hours taught by full-time instructors impacted student performance. The results showed that the number of online overload hours taught was not correlated with either course completion or final grades.

These results have some interesting implications for understanding the impact of faculty workload on student success. Shaw notes that "full-time faculty not teaching an overload had a lower withdrawal rate" in their classes than that seen in classes taught by faculty teaching an overload. "However, adjuncts teaching overloads fared better than full-time [faculty]," says Shaw.

There are reasons to believe that adjunct instructors are in a better position to handle teaching an overload schedule than are full-time faculty members. Adjunct instructors may be better able to tailor their schedules to focus on teaching during a particular term, perhaps reducing the number of nonteaching projects that they take on during a particularly busy quarter or semester. Adjunct instructors also do not have the same pressures to research, publish, and serve on committees as do full-time faculty members. Finally, the very act of teaching online may help an instructor handle an overload, as student questions and interaction can be scheduled into the faculty member's day in blocks rather than occurring randomly during in-person encounters. "Adjuncts had a lower

non-completion [rate] than full-time [faculty]" when teaching an overload schedule, Shaw says. This implies that adjuncts "have a better capacity than full-time [faculty to handle] overload."

The study also put to rest some of the concerns that had been voiced about grade inflation. Some people had expressed concern that adjuncts might be tempted to give better grades than do full-time faculty members, so that students would give positive reviews and the adjunct would be invited back to continue to teach. However, Shaw reports that both employment types showed similar grade distributions. Full-time and adjunct online faculty members did show similar problems in that an increase in teaching overload increased the amount of "suffering" as measured by non-completion rates.

These findings point to some of the implications for practice in colleges and universities. "We have to create policies [centered] around faculty workload," Shaw says. She adds, "administrators need to ensure we dedicate sufficient time to teaching." This may include establishing policies that discourage teaching overloads, rather than continuing with policies that may have been put in place when teaching online was less attractive to instructors and overloads were less of a problem. "[We need to] look at overloads and make sure they're not so enticing faculty can bite off more than they can chew," Shaw explains. Ultimately, this may pay dividends in the form of not only lower non-completion rates but also greater student satisfaction. "Students come back to their 'user experience'; we need to protect that," Shaw says.

The original study leaves "a lot of opportunity for future research," Shaw notes. Such investigations may include work to determine whether the conclusions found in this study are transferrable across institution types and geographical areas.

Future work could also focus on understanding more about adjunct instructor workload. Since many adjunct instructors today build an "entrepreneurial" schedule filled with teaching at multiple institutions and possibly pursuing freelance work, understanding their entire workload could be helpful in preventing overextension. The research could help colleges and universities enact policies that help students succeed while supporting faculty members in their workload.

Supporting Student Retention in Online Courses

By Poonam Kumar, PhD and Marilyn Skrocki, PhD

Students like online classes due to their flexibility and convenience. But not all students do well in these courses; the statistics indicate that online classes have a much higher drop-out rate compared to traditional face-to-face classes. The attrition rates in online courses tends to be 10 -20% higher than face-to-face classes. While there are some personal factors that could influence a students' decision to drop out; many of the factors are related to institutional and course level support – and these barriers can be addressed with thoughtful planning and implementation. Institutional level factors like technical support, academic support, advising, and availability of resources can support student success in online courses. At the course level, there are many simple strategies and techniques that instructors can use to support students success in their online classes.

Course organization and layout

Many students drop out of online courses because they feel overwhelmed and sometimes frustrated with the amount of information presented to them and the way it is presented. Learners can experience "cognitive overload" if the information presented to them is not logically organized and the course design is not easy to follow. In such cases learners will end up spending a lot of mental energy just trying to figure out how the course is organized and how to find information and may end up feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. The design and layout of the course can minimize this frustration and help students focus on the content rather than navigation issues.

- Provide a simple and consistent layout and navigation for the course. For example, use weekly modules/lessons and their titles and dates should correspond to the schedule on the syllabus. Use the same layout for each module (for example, overview, objectives, readings, viewings, assignments etc., differentiate between required and recommended Reading) as too much variation could overwhelm students.
- For variety, present some information via the visual channel and some information via verbal channel.
- Explain and show the structure and layout of the course by making a "course tour" video.

Clearly communicate expectations

Many students report feeling lost and confused in online learning environments. Due to lack of face-to- face contact sometimes students are unclear of the expectations or need reassurance that they understand the expectations.

- Instructors need to provide detailed and very explicit instructions about the course format, assignments, expectations, grading criteria etc.

- Provide a "Frequently Asked Questions" section with a list of questions that students may have about the course
- Provide rubrics and sample assignments. Creating short video tutorial explaining the rubric and assignment would give students very concrete idea of the expectations.
- Quiz tool can be utilized to assure comprehension of course responsibilities as outlined in the syllabus. Students are allowed multiple attempts to make the quiz low pressure and assure confidence when utilizing the quiz tool function.

Many students report feeling lost and confused in online learning environments.

Prepare students

Many times students enroll in online courses without a realistic understanding of what it takes to be a successful learner in an online environment. Online learning environments are better suited for students who are self-disciplined, motivated and know how to manage their time. An orientation to online learning and tips on how to succeed in online courses can better prepare students for online courses.

The Student Orientation should include discussions of:

- Technical skills
- Understanding of Online/ Hybrid learning environments
- Study Skills
- Workload Management
- Communication
- Resources- Technical help and other campus resources
- Welcoming and personal introductory video of the instructor in a non-academic role
- A library of resources on issues affecting online instruction such as time management, computer accessibility, willingness to reach out with questions etc.

Chunk the content and scaffold instruction

Sometimes the workload and reading requirements in online courses may seem daunting to students, especially if they don't have very good time management and prioritization skills. Chunking and organizing the content meaningfully into modules/units not only makes it easy for students to understand and remember the concepts but also makes it more manageable for them. By doing this instructor can present complex concepts/ideas in "bite size information" so students can understand, apply and retain the information. By incorporating assessments and feedback with every learning module, instructors have the opportunity to scaffold students' learning.

- Divide big assignments or projects into smaller milestones to help students manage the workload and to provide feedback at each step.

- Provide review sessions or instructional videos where you notice gaps in learning to clarify concepts.

Humanize the course

Students report that one of the main reasons they drop out of online courses or programs is because they feel lonely and isolated. Learning is a social activity; we learn through interactions and discussions with others. In absence of face-to-face contact, online learning can be an isolating experience if there are no opportunities to interact with others in the course. Humanize the online experience through personal interactions, stories and add the human touch to it.

- Set a warm welcoming tone right in the beginning of the course to connect with students.
- Do ice breaking activities to create a community of learners. Ask students to share personal profiles, bios, stories and other examples
- Offer a "live" orientation session through Skype or any other web conferencing tool so students have the opportunity to interact with the instructor in real time
- Provide a discussion forum for non – course related social interactions
- Encourage peer to peer support
- Incorporate group work
- Provide a personal response to each student on their personal profile.
- Encourage students to contact you when commenting on their assignments or discussion postings. A simple "as always, contact me with any questions" assists with comfort when seeking additional information.

These simple strategies will help students succeed in your courses.

Dr. Poonam Kumar is the director of online/hybrid learning and Dr. Marilyn Skrocki is an associate professor of health sciences at Saginaw Valley State University.

Chapter Five Supporting Students through Recruitment Strategies

All articles were selected from *Recruitment & Retention* newsletter.

Graduate Recruitment: One Possible Solution to Enrollment Dilemma?

Undergraduate-focused institutions often have a cookie-cutter approach to recruitment. When the calendar flips to August, most schools consider this the start of a new cycle with the clock ticking down to May 1. The calendar year follows a fairly predictable path, with a few creative adjustments along the way.

For many institutions, a declining number of high school graduates, decreasing enrollment numbers, and unpredictable yield rates are contributing to the colleges' need for new ideas, particularly in the area of revenue generation. Many admissions offices are now turning to their graduate programs, hoping to increase those enrollment numbers.

Shift from undergrad to graduate

The ultimate goal of a recruitment plan, be it undergraduate or graduate, is to align with the needs of the institution. If these needs force a shift to graduate recruitment, it will take a substantial push to see changes in enrollment numbers due to the nature of these programs.

Patience is the first component of any new recruitment plan. Both admissions staff and senior administrators will need to create a realistic timeline for the new venture. Identifying areas of collaboration with local industries, neighboring colleges, and faculty will also create a smoother transition. Innovation of recruiters and all campus and off-campus partners will help each institution rise above its competition.

The following compilation is by no means a comprehensive graduate plan. This is simply the springboard to begin the transition that so many of our colleagues will experience as the admis-

sions landscape continues to shift. Patience, collaboration, and innovation have already been identified as starting points. While keeping these in mind as overarching ideas, you can use the following focused action items to develop ideas to enroll a bigger and better graduate class.

Identifying programs

Depending on the number of graduate programs your institution supports, it may be impossible to create an all-encompassing plan. The first task is to identify which programs will produce the greatest return on investment. What programs are consistently not reaching enrollment capacity? Which untapped industries requiring advanced degrees surround the campus? The answer to these questions may be data-driven and may take some time to identify.

The first task is to identify which programs will produce the greatest return on investment.

If graduate enrollment is a priority because tuition revenue is down, the focus will likely fall on the programs that have the most room for growth. For instance, Program A has a capacity of 120 students, but only enrolls 100. Meanwhile, Program B has the same capacity, but only enrolls 80 students. Although Program B has the greater growth ability, the potential needs to be assessed. Perhaps Program B is within a failing industry. It may not be worth the effort to recruit if the program will no longer be relevant to society in 10 years. This research is not easy to access and may take longer than the actual implementation of the recruitment plan.

Creating relationships

Once programs have been identified (10 to 15 percent of graduate programs is an ideal start), it is time to consider who needs to be involved with the growth plan. Key players will be program directors, faculty, current graduate students, alumni, marketing, local media, local industries, and neighboring institutions.

Many of these partnerships can be sacrificed at the start, but not the faculty working within the program. After assessing the structure of the college, determine who needs to have a seat at the table (vice president, deans, department chairs, etc.). Set up an initial meeting with this group and present the data.

It is crucial at this stage to foster a buy-in and understanding of why new efforts are needed. Be prepared to share how involved the faculty will need to be in this process. At the start, it may be attendance at one open house per year. Or it may be participation in lunch meetings with local businesses.

During the initial organizational meetings, take a moment to ask what the faculty may already be doing that could be integrated into a comprehensive plan. They may have already developed

a publication/newsletter or hosted events on campus. Maximize current ongoing initiatives while planning for the new ones.

What type of relationship has been established with your marketing or publications department? If the admissions office has complete control of this division, the process will be much easier. Those institutions that outsource their work or partner with other departments will need to generate a similar buy-in for realistic outcomes. Know the types of media you would like to use based on budget restrictions. Items such as brochures, emails, and postcards are fairly simple. If you will be asking for radio time, billboards, or airport advertisements, these items should be presented up front, even if they are options to explore in later years.

Current students and alumni of graduate programs may be your biggest community partners, provided they are willing to share their experience. A focus group may provide a nice starting point to determine why students chose your institution and their career outcomes. This can assist in both the marketing strategies for the future and testimonials to include in publications and conversations. The use of social media could be one way to link current undergraduates with current graduate students.

Corporate partners may be highly dependent on the location of your institution and types of courses taught. If your target programs are offered as a global campus (online), your options for industry relationships are endless. For an institution offering on-campus or hybrid experiences, partners should be focused within a certain radius of the campus.

On- and off-campus events

Graduate programs are identified and partners are now on board. Next, it is time to form the actual recruitment plan, beginning with a timeline of events for each program. If your institution offers an undergraduate open house, a graduate equivalent will be the simplest addition to the on-campus programs. Graduate tours in the evening for specific groupings of academic areas might also create a personalized feel for prospects. For instance, offer an evening event for all science programs. Begin with a tour followed by faculty conversation and light refreshments.

The ability to offer off-campus events will depend on the budget of the institution and the willingness of faculty to participate. For instance, businesses may be agreeable to hosting your institution, but it should be worth their while. Offering lunch during your presentation will be appealing. These lunches should involve a short faculty presentation.

The steps described only scratch the surface of developing a graduate recruitment plan. It is rare that this type of plan will take shape overnight, or even effectively over a year, but a logically structured approach that fits your institutional setting will make it that much easier to develop an effective plan that yields positive results.

Jennifer Ziegenfus is the assistant director of university admissions at Towson University.

Counselor's Notes: On-the-Spot Admissions

Written by: Leroy Satchell

Of the various strategies that college admissions offices implement to reach their strategic goals, one that has continued to increase in popularity is the "on-the-spot" or "on-site" admissions strategy. This usually involves some form of instant admission in which the admissions officer conducts an interview with a student, reviews the student's application and supplemental materials, and offers an admissions decision the same day.

This program provides benefits for the college admissions officer, the high school student, and the guidance counselor. The benefits for the admissions officer include the increased appeal to students, the attraction of students who tend to be higher achieving, and the partnerships fostered with the various constituents involved. All the while, the guidance counselor and student also benefit from a less stressful college search process and increased confidence. In addition, on-the-spot admissions provides a unique opportunity for admissions officers and guidance counselors to establish deep-rooted recruitment pipelines.

In my time serving as an admissions officer, I was able to note three distinctive ways that the on-site admissions program proved to be advantageous in forming relationships and benefiting all constituents involved. Unlike other traditional methods, these targeted efforts require more intentional interpersonal connections, and the partnerships formed with guidance counselors are some of the most valued resources in the recruitment process.

Displays investment

On-the-spot admissions are not like the traditional 30- to 40-minute presentations in which an admissions officer visits a high school and delivers information to students to "sell" them on the school. On-site admissions is an investment. It takes time.

In the traditional model, the admissions officer can be seen as one who has a "passerby" relationship. The admissions officer has a list of schools that must be visited on that particular day, so at times the school can be seen as a checkmark on a to-do list—admissions officers in this case are simply presenting information, taking inquiries, and moving on to the next location.

In contrast, an admissions officer hosting an on-site admissions program can spend upwards of four hours (or longer) at one school sifting through the paperwork, answering questions, and interviewing students. This method is more of a quality-versus-quantity approach. However, due to the care that is expressed, the quantity of interested students increases. The guidance counselor and the student recognize the investment, and it stands apart from what they might see from admissions officers on a daily basis.

Provides value

When conducting the on-the-spot admissions program, the admissions officer actively seeks to gather information from the student, as opposed to solely providing information to the student about what the institution can offer them. Officers learn about the student's interests, his or her goals and dreams, and what the student is seeking in an institution.

This on-site program tells students that there are institutions that are interested in hearing from them and hearing about them. As a result, this program provides immense value to students, particularly those who are first-generation and are lacking the knowledge and confidence related to their qualifications. These students are provided with a platform to connect personally with an admissions officer who can provide each student with firsthand information on how the institution can help that student achieve their college and career aspirations.

Creates partnerships

As one who has served as both an admissions officer and a high school guidance counselor, I have found that one of the indirect benefits of the on-site admissions program is the opportunity it provides to connect guidance counselors back to an aspect of the job that originally interested them in the field: servicing their students in a way that makes a difference.

Guidance counselors are provided with an opportunity to remove themselves from the administrative components of their positions and immerse themselves in the actualization of students' dreams. Providing counselors with this opportunity to help aid their students in achieving their goals causes a connection that can supersede that of the traditional counselor relationship.

As a result of this phenomenon, guidance counselors are actively searching for students who meet the criteria and are a good fit for the institution. Due to the connectedness of this process, admissions officers have created ambassadors of the guidance counselors. Although they are not direct representatives of the institution, they still serve as advocates for the students and are proud to point them in the direction of a trusted admissions officer.

The manner in which these relationships form only displays a small piece of the overarching benefit to students and professionals. And although much research points to the favorable outcomes of on-site admissions programs (and other nontraditional programs like them), it is up to each institution to assess the demographics of its student population (both current and anticipated) and devise a plan to best implement these changes in a way that will produce seeds of longevity.

Despite where an institution is at in the process of formulating its recruitment goals, staff members can be assured that these programs and strategies continue to help colleges and universities develop recruitment pipelines and partnerships that will assist in navigating the ever-changing landscape of college admissions.

Leroy Satchell is a guidance counselor at Wicomico High School in Salisbury, Maryland. He formerly served as a senior admissions counselor at Salisbury University.

Resources

How Do Master Teachers Create a Positive Classroom?

This program shows you how to incorporate creativity, optimism, enthusiasm, approachability, and humor to create a positive classroom environment that supports learning.

How Can Course Design Help Prevent Online Cheating?

Learn the techniques that other schools have successfully used to slash the potential of cheating, assuage student anxiety about their academic performance, and propel them toward being more honest, self-reliant learners.

What Steps Can I Take to Foster a Collegial Department?

Uncollegial behavior can cause faculty to disengage or leave altogether. Learn a proactive approach to promoting civil, professional behavior in your department.

How Do I Monitor and Support Online Faculty?

Learn how to communicate with faculty about expectations for their performance. Examine how the hiring, training, development, and evaluation of online faculty can come together in a holistic approach that reinforces these teaching competencies.

Building a Low Cost Out-of-State Enrollment Strategy

Tips and tools to garner more out-of-state students at minimal cost. Learn strategic and tactical advice for strengthening your out-of-state student market penetration, and increasing your applicant and enrollment numbers.