Thriving in Academe

REFLECTIONS ON HELPING STUDENTS LEARN

Thriving in Academe is a joint project of NEA and the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (www.podnetwork.org). For more information, contact the editor, Douglas Robertson (drobert@fiu.edu) at Florida International University or Mary Ellen Flannery (mflannery@nea.org) at NEA.

Teaching Naked

It's not what you think! The best place for technology is outside of the classroom, as a content and assessment delivery system that will give you more time in the classroom with prepared students.

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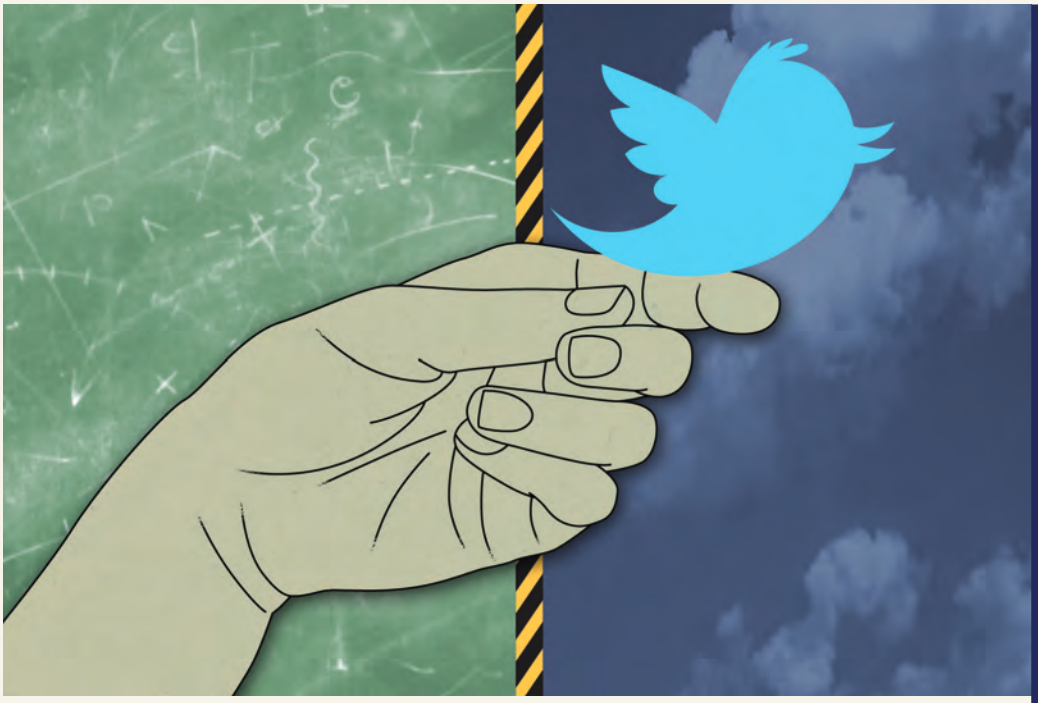
Putting technology in its place.

Make no mistake, technology has a place. That place just happens to be the dorm room or library, where it can give students compelling reasons to engage with class materials. That place is not the lecture hall, where we too often rely on PowerPoint presentations and other passive technologies to speed through content by hour's end.

This is not first century B.C. When Plato or Cicero wanted to pass along information to a large group of students, their most efficient technology was an amphitheater and a loud voice. But today, students don't need a professor in the room if they're just going to sit and listen to a lecture or watch a film.

It is clear today that what's of value to students is student-to-faculty interaction: small group discussions, individual attention and unstructured, interactive learning. By using new technologies outside the classroom—including online content, games, course management systems, and the instant communication that students now expect—you can create more time for more learning inside the classroom.

You can't do it all at once, but here are some easy ways to ensure students are better prepared for class, get more feedback, and learn more of the cognitive skills employers say they crave.



Meet José Antonio Bowen

José Antonio Bowen is president of Goucher College. Bowen has won teaching awards at Stanford, Georgetown and Southern Methodist University where he was Dean of the Meadows School of the Arts for eight years. Bowen has written over 100 scholarly articles, edited the *Cambridge Companion to Conducting* (2003), and is an editor of the 6-CD set, *Jazz: The Smithsonian Anthology* (2011). He has appeared all over the world with Stan Getz, Dizzy Gillespie, Bobby McFerrin, Dave Brubeck, and many others, written a symphony (nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in Music in 1985) and is the author of *Teaching Naked: How Moving Technology out of your College Classroom will Improve Student Learning* (Jossey-Bass, 2012), winner of a Ness Award. Stanford University also has honored him as a Distinguished Alumni Scholar. For more teaching ideas, see his blog at teachingnaked.com or follow him on Twitter #josebowen.

Email for first exposure

Social media can be a teaching tool, allowing students to connect ideas to other ideas. It is also a place where you can show your passion: students perceive your messages (as long as you don't over do it!) as supportive and caring. You can also make connections for students. Try asking students to use your Twitter hashtag (#mycourse) and post one connection, or web link, a week. Students often don't even look for the connections between your class and the outside world. In fact, if you don't ever contact students outside of class, you are reinforcing the idea that college is an ivory tower and what happens there stay there. It's not Vegas: first connect.

Email is also a way to personalize and localize content for your students. While the internet offers almost limitless online content, none of it is specific to your students. Use email to offer short motivational introductions to reading, study questions, encouragement, connections, additional thoughts, and further explanations.

Content for first exposure

Try searching for content in your courses as if you were a student—pretend it is cold outside and you have an 8 a.m. class, but your laptop is in bed with you! If you don't know OpenYale, iTunesU, Khan Academy, CrashCourse, Utubersidad (with Spanish language academic lectures) or Merlot.org, start with those. For most subjects, the internet offers a broad range of video lectures,

TALES FROM REAL LIFE > IT'S A DIFFERENT WORLD

When I went to college, my mother gave me a bag of dimes and told me to call home on Sunday. But one Sunday, I forgot. It never occurred to me that I could call on Monday. Does the phone even work on Monday? I waited until the following Sunday and called home. "Hi Mom, It's your son!" "A son? I have a son?" Guilt, in my home, was a dish best served with irony.

Contrast this to the student who recently got trapped in a campus elevator and instead of calling the emergency number listed, called her mother, three states away, who called the university president, who called facilities, who called the emergency number. Just think about the radically different assumptions about social proximity.

If you really want to understand your students ask them about Tinder or Lulu (or download the app if you are really brave). Lulu is for girls, and has profiles for every boy on your campus with ratings from the girls who have dated (yes, that's an euphemism) him. It sounds horrible, but they think it is normal, and they can't imagine sitting by the phone, or going to office hours.

explanations, examples, songs, animations, games and unique ways.

If you don't want to spend a lifetime trolling through millions of online lectures, then set up a wiki for your course and ask your students to create a community study guide using the resources they find. If you offer to make up your final exam from this wiki, you will add an extra incentive.

If you want to make your own content, then skip video capture. A podcast (or any form of presentation that allows for chapters or segments) offers you the power of redundancy. You can now explain or talk for longer than you ever could in class, but more importantly you can include all the examples you want.

Use exams to focus

An unwatched video is no better than an unread book, but you can encourage students to interact with the material by creating online exams before every class. Giving students several "thought" or "study" questions before each class can both guide their learning and give you feedback. It also gives students some control over their learning (itself a research-based pedagogy). Many forms of questions can be graded automatically in your learning management system (LMS) so both you and students can see the results instantly. Try making all of your quizzes due one hour before class (your LMS can ensure this "happens") and you will then have results that may shape your use of class time.

There are, of course, other ways to reach the same goal. Ask students to post strategies for solving problems on the course website, or make their own video summary, or post on the course discussion board.

JUST IMAGINE: YOU NOW FACE A ROOM FULL OF **PREPARED STUDENTS.** WHAT WILL YOU DO?!

Writing to reflect

Writing requires practice. So assign it before every class. I use index cards and ask students to write short paragraphs or arguments about the reading or video content, paraphrase the strongest argument or identify three mistakes, argue for the importance of a theme, or copy a quote and explain why it is essential for the persuasiveness of this reading.

Students then bring these index cards to class and swap with a neighbor, who reads the card and maybe turns it over to write a rebuttal, rewrites the argument from another perspective, or asks some clarifying question. Part of the point is to write, but equally important is that students will be thinking (critically) about the material before class, and trying to find multiple perspectives in what they read.

Bad content is part of the real world. Sensitizing your students to the need to question the quality of their sources is both an important part of critical thinking and an essential life skill. The world is an open book. You look for summaries, abstracts, and shortcuts online; they should too. Help them get better at evaluating sources.

Class to challenge

Just imagine: you now face a room full of prepared students. What will you do?! Start with all of the things you always wish you had time for: discussions, applications, problem solving, connections or challenging of student assumptions. Can you structure your class more like a lab? Read Stephen Brookfield to improve your discussions. If you are ready for more, try playing one of the sophisticated games developed by Mark Carnes, known as "Reacting to The Past."

Your preparation will now become more about the design of an experience, and less about covering content. Remember that more content, more reading and more "exposure" does not necessarily result in more learning. Especially in introductory courses, less content and more focus on

are mostly diagnostic so it is important that they get at crucial issues and guide student thinking. If they want to argue about the answers in class, that is fantastic. This is your window to move them from thinking about facts or opinions into the complex and important world of judgments.

BEST PRACTICES > WRITING BETTER MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

While not the same thing as forcing students to create their own arguments, multiple-choice questions can help students break down problems (and of course, they save time in grading.)

Don't worry about cheating. If you ask questions that Siri can't answer, they will have to think. Make these online exams worth a few points so that students have an incentive to do them, but not so many points that they want to argue about every question. More testing, more often will provide more feedback for you and students, give them more practice with thinking skills, and lower their anxiety about tests.

These sorts of questions are hard to write, but Bloom levels and verbs provide a template for questions that test knowledge, comprehension, analysis, evaluation, and more. For example, "Which of the following are important theories of X?" "Which of the following develop the thesis of X further?" or "Which of the following represents the strongest argument for why…"

Your LMS will also allow you to embed immediate feedback, which can also help stimulate student thinking. These questions

how to study and apply can create more motivated learners for upper-division courses. Very little kills academic motivation more than a freshmen "survey" course that skims the surface all semester.

Cognitive wrappers to self-regulate

The goal of college is to help students develop more complex mental models. We are preparing the mind for the unknown. Ultimately, we want to graduate students who are able to self-regulate their own learning process. John Dewey called it "thinking about your own thinking."

A great way to do this is to use cognitive wrappers (a generalized approach based upon Marsha Lovett's exam wrappers). When handing back a paper, a problem set, an exam, or the audition results, also provide students with a sheet of paper that asks them to reflect on three things: (1) How did they prepare, (2) Where did they lose points, and (3) How might they prepare differently next time. (There is a free template at TeachingNaked.com.) Students will start to see that these three things might be connected.

eCommunication to reinforce

Social media gives you more opportunities to connect, support and interact with your students, but oddly, it also gives you a way to demonstrate the power of slow thinking. Students think that because you are smart and know lots of things, you must always know the answer. They will be shocked and surprised when you want to "think about that question" or "first do more research" and then respond in an email to the entire class. The point of faculty interaction is that you are a role model. Only you can demonstrate to them that what really makes you smart is that you are open to new ideas and allow them to give you new perspective. You now have even more super-powers: you can change your mind.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

WHERE DO I START?

Do I have to be on Facebook?

NO! But you should pick one social media platform and make a determined effort to learn this new perspective on life. If we claim that teaching is preparing the mind for the unknown and that critical thinking requires the ability to see problems from multiple perspectives, then this is a perspective we need. Like any new technology, learning one will also help you with the next one. If you decide LinkedIn is better, you will have some basis for comparison.

But what about reading!?!

Mindful reading is still enormously important, although the reading of long texts is certainly on the decline in most professions. If you want students to read, you need to assign shorter portions, especially in the first year, read them in more depth, practice how you read in an academic setting (in class) and then discuss and use all of what you assign (until students get better at digesting reading on their own). Tell them why they are reading (both your course content and reading in general), and help them get better at it. If reading is important for your discipline, then you need a progressive multi-course plan that teaches students how to do this. Assign more and more difficult reading each year.

I was not trained as a motivator. Shouldn't that be the student's job?

Indeed, motivation was not your problem. You liked school so much that you are still here. Think of what matters to your typical student; ask them (often!) if you don't know. You don't need to be an expert in popular culture, but you need to know what matters to your students, what they want out of life and what they value. This will help you connect with them, but also it will give you tools for motivating them (and that is most of the job really). They don't see the usefulness of biochemistry to their life? Teach them how to make beer.

How do I make a podcast that is better than a lecture video?

Pick a difficult topic in an upcoming class. Create a new PowerPoint file with just a few slides. Click on "Insert/Audio" and talk. Then add another 10, twenty or even more examples of the same concept, but radically different types of examples: sports, fashion, transportation, cooking or local geography. Teach to the many, not the middle. Then next year, recycle and add even more examples (or have students create their own new analogies). Save this as a PowerPoint, do not export to YouTube; then it just becomes one long movie. GarageBand on the Mac also has a "chapter" feature that exports mp4 files.

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Websites:

TeachingNaked.com

Content and Games: KhanAcademy, Merlot.org, Reacting to the Past: http://reacting.barnard.edu/, CrashCourse, Exam Wrappers: http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/examwrappers/

Summary sites: sparknotes, Wikipedia, CliffsNotes, PinkMonkey, gradesaver, enotes, bibliomania.