

Faculty Practices that Promote Academic Success for All Students



By Maria Paiewonsky, Think College

The role of faculty in inclusive postsecondary education is a cornerstone of student success. Effective teaching practices prove to be critical, not only for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) but for all students.

Planning instruction for a diverse undergraduate student body

Good teaching practices for undergraduate students, including those with ID, are grounded in an understanding of the campus and classroom environment. Effective educators question and take into account several factors (Nilson, 2010):

- The student profiles ("Who's in my class?");
 - How people learn ("What will engage them?");
 - How structure increases learning ("How will I connect new learning to their world?");
 - The cognitive development of young college students ("How will this course contribute to their intellectual maturity?");
 - Inclusive instruction ("How can I be sure everyone will benefit from the course?") .
-

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices in higher education assume that ideally, instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments are flexible enough to work for everyone and can be adjusted to meet individual needs (CAST, 2011).

The Higher Education Opportunities Act (HEOA) of 2008 defines UDL as a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practices. The UDL framework (a) provides flexibility in the way information is presented and in the ways that students demonstrate knowledge, (b) reduces barriers to instruction, (c) provides appropriate accommodations, (d) supports and challenges, and (e) maintains high achievement expectations for all students (HEOA, 2008).

Seven principles of good teaching practice

Chickering and Gamson (1991) identify seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. Designing instruction based on these practices leads you to plan effective teaching and learning experiences that also take into account college student development and UDL principles.

Below, we have included descriptions of these practices by Chickering and Gamson, as well as our own examples from inclusive postsecondary education initiatives. These examples showcase how students with ID are learning alongside their peers in college classrooms.

1. Good practice encourages student-faculty contact.

Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of class is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Your concern can help a student through a difficult time and motivate them to persevere to the end of the course. In many cases, it will even serve as encouragement for students to further commit to their college education.

[Insert Adrian's photo with his instructor, Mrs. Trevedi. Quote: "The computer teacher, Mrs. Trevedi, she was nice. Whenever I said I wasn't sure I could do this, she told me to just keep coming back. And I did." -Adrian Matir, student, Introduction to Computers, Quinsigamond Community College]

Three tips for faculty to encourage communication with students:

- (1) Meet with students before the semester begins to discuss their required accommodations and learning style differences.
- (2) Consider in-class office hours to fit students' busy schedules.
- (3) Offer students guided prompts to discuss class concerns (e.g., "What part of the class assignment is easiest or hardest for you?").

2. Good practice encourages cooperation among students.

Good learning is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Research on group work in college classrooms indicates that these collaborative learning experiences lead to active learning, increased productivity, and better relationships between classmates, and between classmates and their instructor.

[Insert Brian's photo. Quote: "This is me and my panel group--Delray, Vanessa, and Leosha. We worked together on the panel. Delray was the leader, I talked about the causes of high school dropouts, and Vanessa and Leosha talked about dropout statistics and the causes from the environment." -Brian Heffernan, student, Public Speaking, MassBay Community College]

Three tips for establishing cooperation among students:

- (1) Be clear about the roles and responsibilities each person has in the group.
- (2) Require students to provide ongoing peer feedback to all group members.
- (3) Provide tips to students about how they can design task lists in accessible formats.

3. Good practice encourages active learning.

Students do not learn much by just sitting in class, listening to teachers. They need to contribute to discussions, write about what they are learning, and apply their learning to activities and to their lives. If they need support to do that, plan for strategies that will help them engage in class.

[Insert photo: Rachel on printer. Quote: "The assignment was to make a book using the head of a famous person. I chose Benazir Bhutto because she looked mysterious, foreign, and because she was different. I was not trying to pick the one that was an easy grade, just the one that was interesting to me." -Rachel Hartley, student, Printmaking, Holyoke Community College]

Three tips for engaging students in class discussions:

- (1) Give students the questions that will be used for class discussion prior to the class.
- (2) Use a photo or illustration as a starting point for a discussion. Give students five minutes to look at the picture. Then instruct them to brainstorm ideas individually, in pairs, or in small groups about how the image relates to the readings.
- (3) Structure assignments so that students must apply learning to real-life problems so that they connect to people directly influenced by the topic. For example, a culinary arts instructor could invite a restaurant health inspector to co-lead a discussion on common restaurant code violations. In another case, a writing instructor might assign students to rewrite and discuss a public safety announcement using principles of plain language and universal design.

4. Good practice gives prompt feedback.

Students need feedback to figure out what they know and don't know, and to fully benefit from a class. They need opportunities to practice what they are learning throughout the course and receive prompt suggestions for improvement.

[Insert photo of Grace at bed: Quote: "The instructor had a reputation for being really good with students, and she was. She knew that hands-on activities in the home health aide course weren't going to be enough. She checked in with everyone, including Grace, in every class to make sure they understood what they were doing well and what they needed to work on." –Jerri Roach, transition coordinator, Worcester Public Schools.]

Three tips for giving feedback to students:

- (1) Provide critical written or verbal feedback to students on assignments within a week of the deadline, even if it's not complete, so the student has prompt feedback.
- (2) Use sample assignments, or photos and videos, to show students what you are looking for in an assignment.
- (3) Set up in-class study groups to prepare for final exams, and share sample study guides with each group.

5. Good practice emphasizes time management.

It is critical for students to learn to manage and use their time well. This skill is necessary now, to meet course requirements, and will be crucial later, to meet work deadlines. Managing time related to course assignments leads to effective learning for students and effective teaching for faculty.

[Insert wall calendar graphic: Quote: "I build in a couple of strategies in my courses to keep students on track. For example, I post a giant blotter calendar by the door, with all the semester's assignments, the points I assign to each assignment, and the due dates. I knew this was successful when, at the beginning of a new semester, when I hadn't put up the new calendar yet, the students asked me when I was going to post it." -Paul Salois, Graphic Communications Instructor, Central Maine Community College].

Three tips for helping students manage their time:

- (1) Structure in-class peer evaluation opportunities to instruct students of self- and peer-editing as well as to promote positive feedback among students.
- (2) Offer students opportunities to submit drafts of assignments, with specific deadlines, for feedback.
- (3) Use multiple calendar systems, as well as text and verbal reminders, to help students meet assignment deadlines.

6. Good practice communicates high expectations.

Holding high expectations for all students will lead to students meeting those expectations. Do not underestimate what students can do, and will do--even those who are considered to be underprepared.

[Insert Professor Johnson and Stephan photo. Quote: "I watched him fully integrate into the class. And it was so important, because as I was teaching them and challenging them to learn, they were also teaching me and challenging me. The course is not easy. They have 10 to 15 essays to write, in addition to the readings, a class presentation, being prepared for discussions in class every week, and having some take-home exams. And Stephan kept up with it all." -Dr. Lloyd Sheldon Johnson, Bunker Hill Community College]

Three tips for maintaining high expectations for students:

- (1) Reserve a few minutes in each class to update a course glossary, made of words gathered by students from weekly readings. Then maintain the glossary on a course blog.
- (2) Pair students up for projects in ways that complement their strengths.
- (3) Take a few minutes in each class to review a study skills strategy--taking notes, following a checklist, checking for understanding with classmates, etc.

7. Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

There are many ways for students to demonstrate their understanding of class material and to contribute to their courses. Students need opportunities to show their strengths and learn in ways that work for them. Instructors can use these strategies to push learning even further.

[Insert photo of Jeremy. Quote: "After a few brainstorming sessions with the ASL professor, Jeremy was able to complete a term paper assignment by interviewing college students who started a hockey team for deaf children and

presenting the results in a PowerPoint presentation. His classmates loved it and asked if they could do their assignment the same way." -Jerri Roach, Transition Coordinator, Worcester Public Schools]

Three tips for teaching diverse learning styles:

- (1) Include videos, images, or software applications in class to complement readings and discussions.
- (2) Create a menu of options students may select from to demonstrate their application of course content. For instance, if a student needs to demonstrate their ability to present a persuasive argument, you could develop a rubric that addresses the assignment criteria. At the same time, you could offer students the option to do the project as a speech, a letter to the editor, a public service announcement, a digital story, or a billboard.
- (3) Consider multiple ways to check for understanding (e.g., one-minute summary paper, "muddiest point of class" check-in, word clouds like Wordle to describe major points taken from class).

Conclusion

Faculty members play a critical role in promoting academic success for students with ID. Effective teaching practices not only provide students with ID with the opportunity to benefit from college courses, but also offer all students the opportunity to meet academic success.

Acknowledgements

This fact sheet is possible because of the work and contributions of many people. This includes students who shared stories about their college experiences: Adrian Matir, Brian Heffernan, Rachel Hartley, Grace Quiah, Stephan Wright, and Jeremy Feingold. In addition, Ty Hanson, a program coordinator from Holyoke Community College, Holyoke, MA; Jerri Roach, a transition coordinator from the Worcester Public Schools, Worcester, MA; and Paul Salois, an instructor at Central Maine Community College, Auburn, ME, shared their experiences supporting students in college.

References

- Bain, K. (2004). *What the best college teachers do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- CAST (2011). *Universal design for learning: Guidelines version 2.0*. Wakefield, MA: Author.
- Chickering, A. W., & Gamson, Z. F. (1991). Applying the seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Gabriel, K. F. (2008). *Teaching unprepared students: Strategies for promoting success and retention in higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- McMahon, D., and Smith, C. S. (2012). Universal design for learning: Implications and applications in UT Knoxville FUTURE Program. *Think College Insight Brief*, Issue No. 14. Boston, MA: Institute for Community Inclusion, School for Global Inclusion and Social Development, University of Massachusetts Boston.
- Nilson, L. B. (2010). *Teaching at its best: A research-based resource for college instructors*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Svincki, M. D., & McKeachie, W. J. (2014). *McKeachie's teaching tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers (14th ed.)*. Belmonte, CA: Wadworth CENGAGE Learning.

