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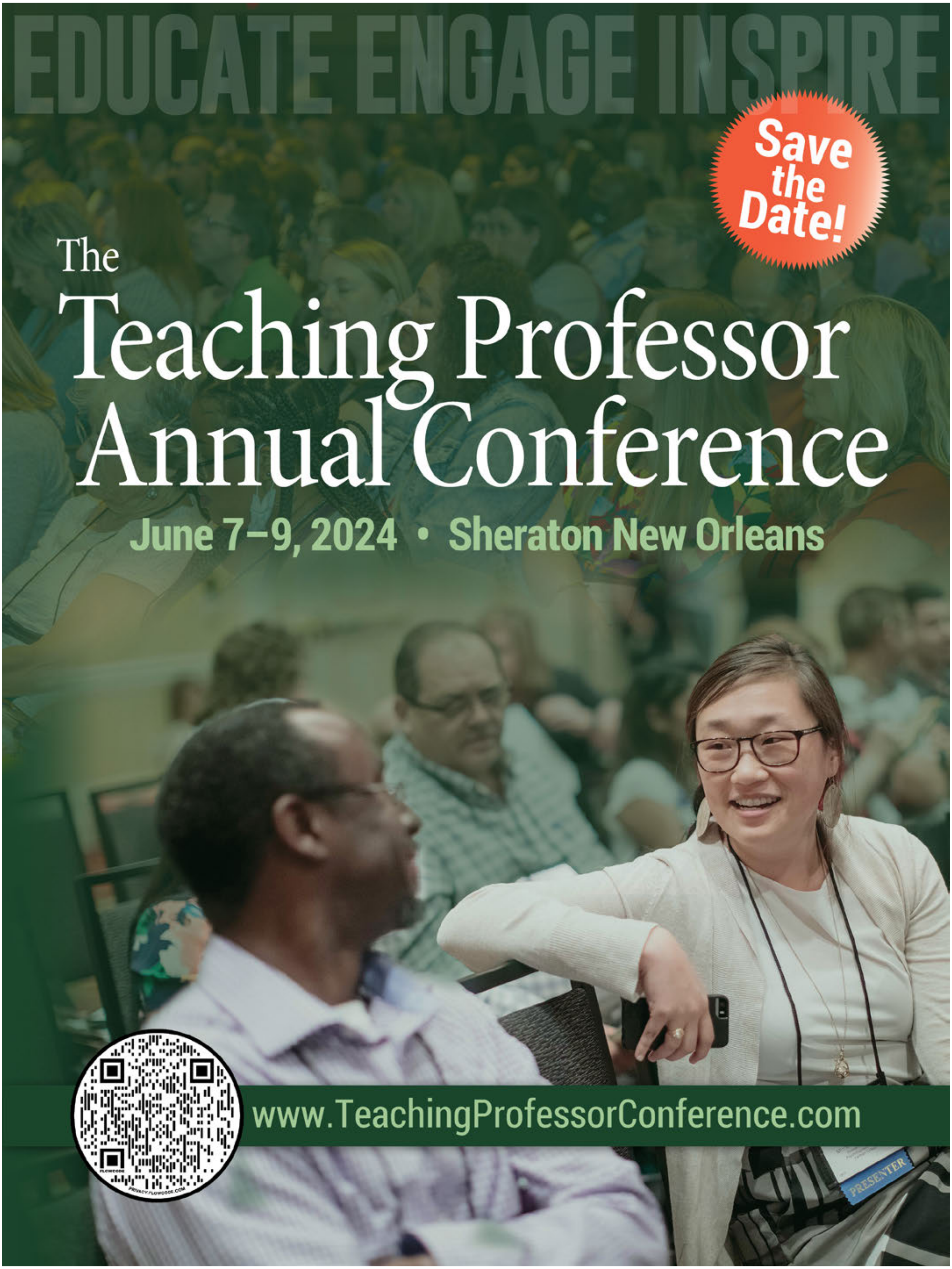
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Bolstering Belongingness: Instructor Leadership Frameworks for Fostering Inclusion

Christina Leshko

Belonging describes the human emotional need to experience acceptance from a group. As a psychosocial concept, belonging or feeling "part of" allows individuals to develop self-concept or self-identity (Turner & Oakes, 1986). For undergraduates, experiencing a sense of belonging, feeling accepted, and building relationships are crucial factors that encourage engagement, commitment to higher learning, and graduation (Strayhorn, 2018).

Experiences that contribute to a sense of belonging are particularly important for historically underserved and marginalized groups. Underserved groups—such as those students identifying as BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, nontraditional, disabled, first-generation, or economically disadvantaged—are more likely to question their social belongingness (Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2017). College campuses have become increasingly diverse, both socially and economically, yet discrimination, bias, and injustice persist.

Leadership theories provide frameworks for faculty to foster inclusive classroom environments and support student belonging while also reinvigorating ourselves in a sometimes draining and politicized work environment. Transformational leadership and inclusive leadership theories both propose to enhance the effectiveness of leaders through aligning participants' identities with organizational visions. These frameworks present leadership behaviors as learned, practiced, and adaptable to various institutional settings. Applying either of these frameworks to the college classroom provides an opportunity to explore mechanisms for increasing student belonging. The following examples illustrate how these components might be achieved in a classroom, with opportunities to adapt to our personal teaching styles.

Transformational leadership theory

According to transformational leadership theory, four components shape leaders' ability to align members with organizational goals. These components include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Vann et al., 2014). Transformational leaders create connections with others that mutually enhance motivation and view obstacles as occasions for growth.

Idealized influence refers to such demonstrable leadership characteristics as being hard-working, trustworthy, and competent. In the classroom, it can manifest in various ways, such as being honest with students regarding our availability or discussing the reasoning behind our policies. If we cannot provide prompt feedback on assignments, we can take accountability. We can share examples of when we found a concept or program challenging or when life circumstances hit us head-on. While faculty are considered subject matter "experts," there is integrity in admitting when we are not sure of the answer to a question.

Inspirational motivation encompasses the idea of charisma, or the ability to communicate in a way that inspires a strong emotional connection in others. Learning and using students' names is a simple yet effective means of building an emotional connection. Recognizing students' achievements both in and outside the classroom can go a long way as well. Doing so can be as simple as acknowledging a thought-provoking question posed by a student or sharing a particularly insightful response to an assignment (with permission from the student). Taking moments to acknowledge particularly stressful times during the semester and checking in with our classes recognizes our shared humanness.

Intellectual stimulation focuses on challenging members of an organization and refusing to accept the status quo. It includes expressing confidence in students' abilities to meet and exceed expectations. If a student is struggling, this may mean directing them to supportive resources (tutoring, supplemental materials, etc.) while still emphasizing the student's ability to meet the challenge. When students arrive to a course underprepared, faculty leaders can step up to meet them where they are by scaffolding learning or supplementing course materials with skill-building exercises (basic research skills, citation formatting, etc.).

Individualized consideration describes a leader's ability to focus on individual needs and provide mentorship. Asking for preferred names and pronouns is a way to both communicate support and recognize individual identities. A quick follow-up with a student who has had an illness or a significant life event demonstrates consideration for their experiences. With the shift toward predominately nontraditional students in our classrooms, we may consider integrating more flexibility into our courses to meet the challenges of those attempting to maintain some sanity in their work-life balance. For me, individualized consideration sometimes requires an attitude shift. Rather than engaging the student who has fallen asleep in class with punitive measures, I seek to help them recognize the patterns in their behavior and develop strategies for managing college expectations.

Inclusive leadership theory

Inclusive leadership theory facilitates belonging with a focus on five primary behaviors: supporting group members, ensuring justice and equity, making shared decisions, encouraging diverse contributions, and helping group members fully contribute (Randel et al., 2018). This theoretical orientation emphasizes enhancing belonging while still allowing group members to retain individualism in working toward shared goals (Randel et al.). The goal is to foster more successfully integrated work environments to support group belonging.

As with individualized consideration, supporting group members requires that we approach students from an ethic of care or a trauma-informed learning perspective. All our students have experienced the trauma of living through a pandemic. Supporting group members involves acknowledging past and present struggles, especially those of students who have come into higher education without structure and consistency from their secondary education. Providing online Q&A discussion boards or setting up a Discord chat can serve as means to empower students to help each other. Understanding the financial and economic challenges our students face requires that we recognize the need for many to work part- and full-time jobs. By making materials, assignments, or content modules available early, we can adapt our courses to support students.

To ensure justice and equity, faculty must be willing to both accept that biases exist and confront them when they arise in the classroom, even when we are responsible for them. Having biases is a part of being human. As faculty, are we taking time to recognize our biases? Are we noticing moments of sexism, ableism, or heterosexism or when microaggressions arise in a discussion? Are we brave enough to invite students to call us out and hold us accountable? These moments are often uncomfortable, but as leaders we are accountable for creating spaces that encourage our students to open up rather than shut down. For me, this has involved participating in workshops designed to help me recognize my biases and privileges and inviting feedback from students.

Shared decision-making involves a collaborative approach to the classroom and can be achieved through a variety of means. We can offer students opportunities to provide input into syllabus policies or due dates. We might invite students to set ground rules, particularly for discussions of difficult or contentious topics. Having options for assignments and allowing students to potentially choose the format of their work (essay vs. presentation vs. podcast) supports a shared decision-making process and is particularly useful for neurodivergent learners.

Encouraging diverse contributions requires that we take a critical look at the content of our courses and consider who is *not* represented. As a white woman, I have a homophilic tendency to choose stock photos, TED Talks, and media clips of people who look and sound like me. Teaching with intention requires that I bring into the classroom voices and perspectives different from mine. When I provide an example of a study on relationships, am I leaving out data on same-sex couples because the default assumption in our society is that "relationship" implies heterosexuality? When we discuss persons with disabilities, am I including examples of less visible learning disabilities? I can encourage diverse contributions by intentionally seeking out voices and non-dominant perspectives.

Students require space to share openly, without fear of judgement or reprisal. If the topic is potentially contentious, I can help members of our classroom fully contribute by having them submit journal entries or reflections rather than planning an open discussion. The broad array of tech tools available provides opportunities to help introverted group members contribute with activities such as live polling and "exit ticket" assignments, where students submit questions related to the day's content. My personal favorites are Menti.com for word clouds and Socrative.com, where I can pose a question to which every student can anonymously respond through their cell phones, with their responses popping up on the classroom screen. Students seeking acceptance and belonging from their peers may not share verbally in a classroom space yet may have much to contribute.

Instructors face so many demands in attempting to deliver a quality educational experience that the idea of adding one more item to the to-do list can be disheartening. But integrating a leadership framework to increase students belonging does not need to consume the limited time we have. Small efforts at relationship building and inclusiveness, consistently applied throughout a semester, create connections that mutually enhance motivation and commitment with our course participants. We are academic leaders and have the privilege of sharing our educational passions with our students; we can give our students the opportunity to share their joys and passions with us.

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Virtual Advising Techniques: Connecting to Promote Student Success

Lora Walter and Tricia Ryan

When academic institutions were forced to move face-to-face courses online in March 2020, the same held true for academic advising. Academic advising became more critical as students faced unprecedented issues and needed support to function in a virtual learning environment. As Morton et al. (2021) claim, there is a connection between good academic advising and student success. Advisors who used to meet face-to-face with advisees suddenly had to pivot to a method that seemed distant and less personal. In our roles as nursing faculty, advisors, and leaders from two different higher education institutions, we recognized the opportunity to collaborate by developing virtual advising techniques that closely mimicked the face-to-face meetings our students were used to. These technological approaches included arranging, preparing for, hosting, and following up after virtual advising meetings with students. We found that students felt virtual meetings were more efficient and preferred this method to face-to-face or phone conversations. This was most true for students who commuted to and from the campus, balanced academic and athletic responsibilities, or maintained a job while taking classes.

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 2006) defines academic advising as purposeful interactions meant to synthesize and contextualize a student's educational experience. It is known that different styles of academic advising exist, including intrusive advising, developmental advising, and appreciative advising. A single advising interaction often includes components of each type. In higher education today, undergraduate students are termed Generation Z. This refers to a generation comfortable with technology and its use, enabling interpersonal contact with peers, professors, and advisors (Hampton & Keys, 2017). Furthermore, this generation exhibits a strong sense of independence, which could result in resistance to seeking help (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Therefore, an efficient process for scheduling and attending a meeting with an academic advisor, even in a virtual environment, is essential to the student's academic success.

Steps of effective virtual advising meetings

1. PRE-MEETING COMMUNICATION

Before scheduling an academic advisement meeting, it is best to communicate directly with the student regarding the meeting's purpose and goals. Often this communication may take the form of an email. As the written word can evoke emotions and perceptions that were not intended, the advisor should be cautious about conveying caring in a respectful, non-accusatory, and nonjudgmental manner. As academic advisors of nursing students, we are comfortable expressing that we care and want to help, but that level of comfort may vary among advisors who practice in different settings and with different student populations.

Maintaining open lines of communication can be challenging with advisees, especially in a virtual environment. As Figure 1 shows, with consistent communication as bookends, the virtual advising process progresses to student sign-up for a virtual meeting, pre-meeting preparation, the meeting itself, and post-meeting follow-up.

Figure 1. The virtual advising process

2. STUDENT SIGN-UP FOR THE VIRTUAL MEETING

When a student's ability to sign up for a meeting outside the advisor's office and the ease of dropping in during open office hours were no longer feasible during the pandemic, we quickly realized that we needed methods to replace those options in a virtual environment. We sought virtual sign-up sheets and various technological tools. SignUp Genius, Calendly, Google Docs, and Teams worked best. We could post links in the learning management system or include them in an email. Students signed up through one of these tools, and the advisor sent a Zoom or Teams link for the meeting. We implemented open office hours using a recurring link that students could use at any specified time. This was effective for students who had a quick question and did not want to arrange a formal meeting.

3. PRE-MEETING PREPARATION

Before the meeting, the student needs to know the nature of the meeting and the goals. For example, a meeting may be necessary to assist the student in choosing courses for the next semester or to discuss a decline in their academic performance. Being clear and staying focused on helping the student succeed is important. Before the meeting is a time for the advisor and the student to prepare. The advisor should review the student's academic plan, grades from courses they've completed, and any communication from their course professors regarding academic progress. It is also necessary for the advisor to review previous advisement meeting notes, academic goals, and any struggles the student disclosed. This action provides the opportunity for continued conversation, assessment of student progress toward goals, and identification of barriers to academic success. We found that incorporating information the student shared in previous meetings helps the student feel heard and supported. The student should be asked to prepare for the meeting by listing questions and concerns they want to discuss. Meeting sign-up applications that provide reminders and Outlook calendar invitations help the student and advisor remember the meeting day and time.

4. THE VIRTUAL ADVISING MEETING

As advising meetings changed to virtual formats, we were concerned that engagement with our students would suffer. We were happy to discover that it did not. As advisors, we prefer audio and visual communication platforms like Zoom, Teams, and FaceTime. Students were more open than expected to attend advising meetings virtually. A challenge for both the advisor and student was familiarity with the features of the virtual advising meeting technology. Whereas Zoom and Teams offer audio, video, and chat features, FaceTime is primarily a video-calling platform. Students were less resistant to having the camera on during virtual meetings than expected, especially when the meeting was only with the advisor and the student. If virtual meeting technology was used for a group advising meeting, however, students preferred not to have the camera on while the advisor or other students spoke. For the advisor, being flexible and clearly explaining in an individual or group meeting the expectation regarding the camera being enabled or not is best. For students who are reluctant to enable the camera during a virtual meeting, we found that allowing them to send an email with a brief explanation was well-received and provided a student-centered compromise.

5. POST-MEETING FOLLOW-UP

After the virtual advising meeting, follow-up is needed to ensure that recommendations provided, goals established, and action steps needed to accomplish the goals are clear. Within the advising relationship, setting goals that a student feels are important and feasible is critical to the student's success. In addition, those goals need to be written and clearly defined. The student should be highly involved in choosing goals and selecting action steps that they consider reasonable and relevant. This will increase their likelihood of completing the action steps and achieving the goal. Whether in person or in a virtual advising meeting, we consistently document a summary of the conversation, academic goals, and action steps. Throughout the pandemic, email was the primary method of written communication. This method still seems to be the most effective way to send the student a copy of meeting documentation to prevent misunderstandings and lay a foundation for the next meeting.

6. ESTABLISHING CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION

The circle is closed for the advisement interaction, yet consistent communication must remain a focus to keep students engaged in the advising process. Because of the pandemic, we were forced to find and adopt changes to continue the academic advising process, which produced a comfort level with virtual tools that can improve our advising techniques moving forward. We found that augmenting face-to-face meetings with virtual meetings and allowing student choice when appropriate, especially when student time is limited, can increase engagement. We found that students are often more comfortable with virtual meetings and willing to "jump on Zoom," which they prefer to phone calls. Offering the choice of meeting type can increase engagement and communication with students.

Challenges and limitations

A significant challenge with virtual academic advising is the belief that a meeting can be scheduled anytime and anywhere. This can be a benefit, but it becomes a challenge if the student or advisor feels that meeting requests or advising needs infringe on personal time. We discovered that parameters of acceptable days or times to meet or discuss academic advisement needs were beneficial for the student and us. This created clear boundaries, so neither the students nor we felt resentful of the advising process. Since virtual meetings often occur in private settings, such as bedrooms and home offices, the use of a blurred or virtual background can provide privacy if desired. Despite an advising meeting being held virtually, the advisor and student need to remember the purpose of the meeting and avoid interactions or personal disclosures that could damage the relationship. It may be more difficult for both the student and the advisor to interpret nonverbal communication in a verbal setting, which could lead to misunderstandings. Clear verbal communication and mutual respect are essential. The decision to use personal cell phone numbers is also a challenge. Whereas it may be common for an academic advisor to access a student's cell phone number, the academic advisor may prefer not to share their cell phone number. A significant limitation of virtual advising meetings is access to technology for both parties. Unreliable access to needed technology—scheduling tools, email, and videoconferencing software—can create a barrier to effective communication.

Conclusion

We found that the virtual advising methods and tools were so successful that they continue to be part of our academic advising process despite returning to "nonvirtual" academia. Students value the ability to schedule advising meetings using available technology and attend non-location-bound meetings. As such, most students are more engaged in the academic advising process, and advising meetings are more efficient for both the student and the advisor. Even though the methods and tools used provide virtual advising support for nursing students, they are transferrable to all disciplines, levels of students, and learning environments in which academic advising is provided.

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Being a Better Advisor by Choice

Janet Wilbert

One need only open an academic blog to see that student success is a hot topic and on the minds of most college and university officials. Often, academic advising is in the mix of important topics that campuses are grappling with to improve student success. Here, I focus on the opportunities that faculty capitalize on to be a part of the solution in student success.

Every campus has an advising scheme. Some campuses use professional advisors, whereas others use faculty or a combination of advising resources (Ellis, 2016). However advising is handled on a campus, faculty who advise should consider their impact on student success and retention. If faculty are a part of the equation, they should adopt a holistic approach to advising.

In defining advising, Hovland (1997) uses terms like “interactive,” “helps,” “goal,” “acquire,” “decisions,” and “personalized.” The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA, 2006) describes an advisor with such words and phrases as “helps to become,” “think critically,” “prepare,” and “educated citizens.” In both descriptions, the process of advising is a two-way, interactive process that the faculty advisor facilitates. One-way advising (advisor telling the student what to do) does not allow the student to explore their goals, expand their understanding, or help them think critically. A faculty advisor should be prepared to ask provocative questions that make a student think during an advising session. Nevertheless, my focus is less on what transpires in that single, required advising session than on all the missed opportunities to connect.

NACADA (2017) recommends that organized advising cater to the needs of the student. There should be intention and purpose to guide the student using all the resources available. The student should develop the capacities to navigate the academic gauntlet, prepare for their future profession, and understand the importance of contributing to society in a meaningful way. At this point, it is important to note that there is a lot to accomplish through good advising; therefore, equating advising to that one (or two) required meeting(s) each semester has to be reconsidered.

Faculty advisors need to look at advising as a semester-long process. This paradigm shift of advising, from one meeting to actively reaching out the entire semester, is more time consuming, more intentional, and requires preparation so that the semester runs smoothly. Connecting and building a relationship that transcends picking classes for the next semester requires that the faculty advisor chooses some key opportunities (or as many as possible) to connect with their advisee.

- **Know your campus resources.** More than merely know that these resources exist, you should walk your campus and visit the tutoring center, health center, women’s center, library, food pantry, campus museum, and more. You should walk in and experience what a student will experience. Imagine a student who has a food insecurity. You could say either, "The campus has a food pantry you should go visit," or, "The campus has a food pantry; I have been there." Imagine the difference in the conversation that follows. In addition to helpful places on campus, you should also note important events and dates for the upcoming semester. The purpose is to identify when and how often you are going to reach out to your advisees. You must embrace your impact on recruiting, retention, and student success (Zarges et al., 2018).

- **To start the advising activities for the semester make an advisee distribution list of their email addresses.** Next, design a welcoming and short email to send before the semester begins. The purpose is to acknowledge the student and let them know that you and the department are happy to have them back; if there are any questions, those can be handled now.
- **Additionally, before the semester begins, it is important to check each advisee's schedule.** Hopefully, the campus has an easy way to do this, but if not, information technology could provide this type of report. This report serves a twofold purpose. First, you can verify that all your students are enrolled for the upcoming semester; second, you can check the courses. Often registration has happened months ago, and since that time, semester grades have been posted and academic programs adjusted, and students might have changed their academic paths. The few hours it takes to review schedules can prevent scheduling mistakes and identify any advisees who have not registered. If an advisee has not registered, you can inquire why.
- **As the semester begins, you should identify opportunities to connect with the advisees.** These opportunities could be last day to add or drop a class, the opening of FAFSA on October 1, homecoming, midterm grades, week four tests, or some departmental event, for example. The purpose is to give the advisee information and not necessarily to ask them to do something. These communications do not have to be emails; they could be texts or notices pushed out through another campus program. The bottom line is to catch their attention with the subject line and keep the correspondence short.
- **If the campus uses an early alert system, you should take advantage of this.** When you are notified that a student is struggling in a class, this is another opportunity to connect with your advisee. If there is not an early alert system, then a week four check-in with all the advisees can be important.
- **By the time of the semester when traditional advising sessions occur, there have already been several opportunities to connect with advisees.** The traditional advising session should be planned and prepared for using the NACADA core competencies. You should start by reading any previous advising notes so that when the advisee arrives, the conversation can take on a familiar tone (Schaffling, 2018). Advising sessions should start with affirming and relationship-developing questions. You could ask, "How are you?" "What did you do last summer?" or "How is that puppy we talked about last time you were here?" Get to know the advisee as a human, as a student to guide, and as a future graduate. During this conversation is when you will pick up any apprehen-

sion the student has about their well-being. Here is where the conversation might lead to housing or food insecurities, financial troubles, family illnesses, or mental health. The advising session conversation should progress from the familiar to the professional, "just-in-time," "need to know" information and end with the next semester's schedule.

- **At the end of the semester, advising wraps up.** When grades are posted, you should check final grades and send out an email congratulating those advisees who have had a successful semester and one connecting with and providing guidance to those who have not. At this time you can also check to make sure that each advisee is registered for classes, that the classes they have signed up for are correct, and that their academic progress is on target. Those advisees who are not registered for classes become a retention opportunity. Contact the advisee and find out what might be going on or whether there are obstacles that you can remove. Some students drop out of college because they perceive their situation as monumental and do not see a pathway out. A simple email or text letting them know there is help might be all they need to explain their situation and accept the guidance they need.

Advising can bring great joy. Developing a relationship with an advisee and sticking with them until they graduate is rewarding. It is even more rewarding if the advisor's efforts have "saved" the advisee in some way. Not every advisee is going to need the purposeful engagement of advising throughout the semester; the advisor will figure that out. By reaching out to advisees in a more meaningful way and through various forms, advisors open a door that many advisees will walk through.

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Teach How? Faculty's Role in Centers for Teaching and Learning

Sandi Connelly

What are the biggest stumbling blocks for faculty in the improvement of their teaching? Time cannot be your only answer.

Next question: Who are the people who are most critical to your teaching success? Did you shout, "My teaching and learning center"? Maybe. But my guess is you don't text your center at midnight when the learning platform is misbehaving, your lecture for tomorrow is a hot mess, your kids (or pets or partners) want to know why you are still staring at your computer, and you are really thinking about dusting off that résumé for a good ole nine-to-five job. Is it your office mate? Your teaching partner? Your bestie, who may not even be a teacher? Probably. So if the teaching and learning center isn't your first stop, why does it exist?

Let's take a walk down memory lane.

Over the past 16 years I have spent countless hours working with our teaching and learning center, sometimes as the consultee but more often leading workshops and teaching circles and giving demos on my latest classroom techniques. I thoroughly enjoyed the latter (and I was not the only faculty member called upon to do such!), but I was hired by my institution to teach classes—to students—and there came a time when I had to give up these side hustles to focus on other department-imposed demands. But somehow I was still the go-to in my college for all things online learning, crazy new techniques, flipped and hybrid classroom design, and more. I do not tell you all these things for bragging rights; far from it. Instead I want you to ask yourself as I have many times: Why me?

My colleagues at other institutes speak of instructional designers being embedded in their disciplinary colleges. Fascinating! Our teaching and learning center, while having the potential to break down disciplinary silos, often felt incomplete to me. Other colleagues spoke of centers in which all the instructional designers and consultants were former faculty of their same institutions! What a magical land! Why does a world like this seem so intriguing? What was it about faculty being instructional consultants that seemed so novel yet so innate? I gave up this world for other demands, but when times get tough, the tough go home.

March 2020 threw us all into a tailspin. Immediately, I found myself on endless Zoom meetings (my daily record? 18 hours straight), putting together a survival plan to get a pile of science and math majors through labs, workshops, recitations, and of course lecture—all online. Suddenly, I was meeting with deans. Faculty I didn't know were begging for time on my calendar, all while I was still teaching

12 contact hours of my own chaos. Why? Why aren't they contacting our teaching and learning center? Why are they not delving in to the years of research on online course design? Why are they not talking to international experts in instructional design (they were hosting like a million free online seminars)?

And then, like all good ideas, it hit me one morning while I was washing my hair. They aren't looking for answers; they are looking for someone who is crawling in the gutter with them, who is awakened at night with the same worries and struggles, who is teaching the same kind of classes they teach. They want a friend in their neighborhood, not a guru.

Next question: How is your teaching and learning center formed? How does that form match what the faculty need to function? Biology tells us form and function evolve together. Has your teaching and learning center formed to meet the function of the faculty? My guess? No.

In March 2020, our center formed a faculty group from all the disciplinary colleges. The idea of this group was to bring information to the center so they knew what programming to create and offer. While there was some information that could go back out to the colleges, did it? As with anything, that depended on the college representative. But there was something to this. The college reps became ambassadors to the center. It suddenly had the feeling of that magic world we talked about before. Now, none of these individuals would stake any claim to be trained instructional designers or consultants. So why were they seen as so valuable? They were friends in the neighborhood.

Don't get me wrong; teaching and learning centers have value, and lots of it. Schuman et al. (2013) talk about cocreating value. A business term, "cocreating value" focuses on all stakeholders and puts muscle behind form because the form *must* suit a function. While some find this approach too "consumer" (and there are many who fear consumer-driven higher education), give this two minutes of thought: Who are the stakeholders for a teaching and learning center? Yes, center staff and faculty. But who else? What about the students? These centers are typically named some rendition of teaching *and* learning, yet we so often leave the students out in a field somewhere. What about the administrators? I don't mean the reporting structure of the center. I mean the department chairs, the associate deans, the program directors. The folks who are tangential to the trenches but have an ear to the storm drain waiting for the next big thing to come down the pipe. If centers are not taking all these valuable opinions in regularly (not just twice a year at an advisory council meeting), how can the form and function evolve together?

What do faculty need to get over those stumbling blocks we thought about 1,000 words ago? Technology? Sure. Pedagogy? Yes—just not all theoretical (and some days no theory, please, just tell me what to do, not why). Professional support (promotion, etc.)? Maybe; it depends on the institution. Personal support? Every day of their careers.

Remember that person you texted when your life was falling apart at midnight? They probably gave you the *exact* answer to fix the stupid LMS, a terrific idea for an activity to save your hot mess, or just a "You've got this; you are amazing." During 2020, some of those college reps we discussed became this person for dozens of faculty. They were the quick-fix person for faculty exactly when they needed it. Centers are great places to learn to teach—when you have the *time*. As we continue to struggle with work-life balance, the need for the quick fix is not going away. This means that to function, we need the centers to change form.

Clark and Saulnier (2010) introduce the "seven characteristics of an intellectual community" as they outline broadening the scope of teaching and learning centers. While every characteristic on their list should be a point on every center's strategic plan, I am drawn to #4: "fostering collaborations among campus constituencies (students, faculty and staff)." To build an intellectual community (isn't that what higher ed is supposed to be doing!?), we have to foster collaborations and use them to build intellectual classroom (building relationships) and non-classroom (spontaneous exchange of ideas) intellectual spaces. By this, the role of a center should be focused on building relationships with *all* the campus stakeholders and fostering the relationships of stakeholders beyond the classroom. Relationships *first*.

Fast forward to 2023. We now have center faculty fellows (six disciplinary and two strategic initiative) who are teaching in their own disciplines. They are a true two-way conduit bringing information from the colleges to the center for program development (theoretical and applied, feedback on technology, etc.), and they are running programs in their own colleges focused on the "do this." They are becoming the quick fix their colleagues need, but they are also paving the way for the center to broaden its scope and develop relationships to support 21st-century faculty with departments across campus.

We *know* how to create a learning environment. We preach it every day. And when we forget, there are great references to remind us how (e.g., Bishop & Verleger, 2013). Now is the time to open our minds to making our centers into classrooms for our faculty. Embrace partnerships, bring in faculty to be consistent liaisons, and get back to our teaching roots. This is the way to make a center for teaching *and* learning live up to its name. Until this idea spreads, keep those teaching friends on speed dial. It is almost midnight somewhere.

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Day One: Cultivating a Classroom Culture Conducive for Connections

Tiffany Sayles

All educators have the incredible opportunity to cultivate a classroom culture conducive for student learning. Instructors are eager and ready to impart knowledge to students. But more important than our teaching is our reaching. Students learn as a result of connections that we can create through classroom culture starting on day one. To promote learning, our primary responsibility is to create classrooms where students feel connected to the instructor, one another, and the content. This topic is relevant for both novice and veteran instructors in higher education to learn strategies and practices that promote a successful and sustainable teaching philosophy.

The beginning of each semester provides instructors with a great opportunity to develop and create classroom practices that foster student connections. Regardless of the years of teaching experience, instructors continually seek to implement new strategies to enhance the overall learning community. An anonymous author states that "students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Rita Pierson provides a different perspective: "Students don't learn from people they don't like." Relationships expand instructors' reach. Connections are key, and there are four foundational ways to build connections with students.

Connection #1: Instructor to student

The primary connection in the classroom setting is between students and instructors. Cooper and Fry (2020) found that instructors influence students' sense of belonging, quality of instruction, and overall educational experience. We truly have the power of influence. Instructors can connect and build rapport with students in multiple ways through simple activities as follows: appropriately disclosing fun and personal information through an introductory activity; providing students with accessibility through channels of communication (email, phone numbers, office hours, chats); and enthusiastically expressing an initial concern for each student's holistic success. One popular activity I use is the 3-2-1. I share three fun and interesting facts about myself, two personal goals, and one expectation for the class. Modeling this technique with students and inviting reciprocal participation in the activity generates extensive conversations and jumpstarts connectedness.

Connection #2: Student to student

Building rapport with students allows instructors to shape another important connection: peer-to-peer connection. Instructors serve as an essential bridge in this connection. Sidelinger et al. (2016) explored the primary factors contributing to student success and persistence, which included connections with peers. Aiding students with connections enables successful integration in the classroom. Social integration supports student engagement and success due to increased collaboration and involvement.

There are many ways to build student connections within the classroom. Find a Friend Bingo is a fun and interactive way to break the ice as students recognize commonalities with other students. Instructor-developed bingo forms represent characteristics to include classification, activities, fun facts, hometowns, and more. Students can identify students who share similar interests and activities. Once students begin to feel comfortable with peers, collaborative learning emerges.

Instructor-facilitated group projects also help to create community in small groups. I participate as a group member in all small group projects. This allows me to ensure that all group members play an integrated and supportive role. Assisting students within collaborative groups is a powerful way to model employability skills, such as planning, critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, and responsibility. The foundation for successful collaboration is creating safe spaces for students to work together.

Connection #3: Student to campus

Our connections to students promote their connections to peers, which support student connections to campus and its resources—a less intimidating venture. Campus connections begin within the intimacy of the classroom culture. As instructors, our main area of influence on campus is our instructional environment. I welcome students' input in developing our classroom culture code. Each student contributes to sharing practices and expectations geared toward student success. Expectations such as accountability, trust, openness, acceptance, honesty, integrity, and hard work are commonly listed. Once students have developed and established the code, it is my responsibility to reference the code and lead in adherence.

The purpose of culture codes is to build confidence, acceptance, and comfort for each student. This can also be accomplished through instructor-led campus field trips (virtual or on foot). Depending on the school size and time allotted for class, instructors can walk with students (literally or figuratively) to various locations of services and resources in addition to activities available for outside classroom engagement. Often students may be aware of services and resources but need support in locating and accessing them. Devoting one class period to visiting various locations can be a significant connection tool needed for students. Hopkins et al. (2021) found that encouraging and promoting student activities outside the classroom influenced student persistence.

Connection #4: Student to content

Lastly and most importantly, is the connection between students and course content. **Ignacio "Nacho" Estrada states** that "if a child can't learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn." Instructional practices continue to evolve with technological advances. Standing in front of students, lecturing and sharing information without assessing the reach of that information, is similar to throwing food at someone and assuming they'll eat. Instructors' willingness to shift and adjust to the needs of students fosters the ability to connect students to course objectives and content. Peng et al. (2022) found that students were more satisfied and preferred informal learning experiences through active learning classrooms. Multimodal active strategies—such as think-pair-advise-revise, gallery walk, four corners, and fishbowl discussions—promote learning for all students, no matter their academic level or learning preferences.

In conclusion, from day one, instructors have a captive audience. Building key connections with students enables all other connections to emerge. Instructors are privileged with opportunities to create intimate learning spaces for students to connect, learn, and expand. Consequently, students are more open to attending class, more actively engaged in learning, and working more toward success in a collaborative community. Students' eagerness to hear the information instructors share increases when we demonstrate and display consistent care.

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Using FeedbackFruits Tool Suite for Better Student Engagement

Toni Nicoletti and Vicki Brace

Student engagement is a commonly heard phrase in online teaching workshops and conferences. Its popularity is due, in part, to the rise of online courses during the pandemic and seeing how we risk trading the conveniences and flexibility of online learning with passive and isolated learning environments. Asynchronous classes promote flexibility to maximize student accessibility to online learning but often come at the cost of passive learning environments in which students find it difficult to engage meaningfully with course content, cram to complete important assignments and exams, and lose out on a more enriching learning experience.

A nationwide survey by Top Hat found that over 78 percent of students did not find online engaging, as they missed interacting with their classmates and instructors (Lai Read, 2020). While things may have shifted since the pandemic started, as students have adapted to online courses, instructors still struggle to engage students when they cannot use their verbal and nonverbal passion and enthusiasm to motivate student interest in their topics. Instructor presence is an important way to foster student engagement, and many asynchronous classes do not allow for set meeting times, whether in a classroom or online. Additionally, recorded video lectures do not always have the same effect as engaging with students in class.

These issues accounted for many of our design team's conundrums during a period of rapid growth in our college's online courses during and after the pandemic. To remedy the issues, we sought various methods and tools to help foster an engaging learning environment in the online classroom, for both students and instructors. We wanted our students to engage more meaningfully with course content and wanted to facilitate our instructors' ability to establish their presence in the online classroom.

One of the tools we integrated with our learning management system (LMS) for this purpose was FeedbackFruits, which seemed to offer tools that could meet our student engagement needs. For this article, we discuss three tools our instructors used for student engagement, and that you might find particularly, helpful as well; the **interactive document** tool, the **interactive video** tool, and the **assignment review tool**.

Interactive document tool

One of our instructors had the goal of making sure all students had the opportunity and incentive to complete reading assignments effectively and implemented the interactive document tool for this purpose. Philosophy professor Dr. Patrick Anderson said about his decision to use the interactive document tool, "What I was trying to figure out is, how can I set things up so that I reach every single student and give them the maximum possible, based on where they start when they come into the class" (Hasan, 2023)?

He found a solution in FeedbackFruits' interactive document tool. Dr. Anderson uploaded documents for social annotation, allowing students to engage in meaningful interactions with each other, highlighting interesting passages, raising and answering questions about the content of the readings, and collaboratively addressing issues in the text.

Interactive video tool

The interactive video tool can be use similarly to engage students. As the instructor, you can upload videos into the Feedback Fruits' tool in your LMS and add questions and discussion prompts to make the video an interactive experience. The tool can promote learner-content engagement, and we advise using it as a formative assessment to help students prepare for summative assessments. For example, in a business course on professional writing at our college, students watched a video on how to identify and use the active and passive voice in professional writing, stopping at intervals to complete quiz questions about the appropriate use of the active and passive voice prior to completing a graded assignment in which they had to revise a piece of professional writing. The interactive video assignment gave students an opportunity to learn from their errors, as well as practice revising sentences prior to completing the graded writing assignment.

About these tools, Dr. Anderson said, "It is very easy to add annotation to a reading or an assigned text or video so that students have to engage to get credit for it" (Hasan, 2023). Dr. Anderson's colleagues have now joined him in using these tools in their philosophy courses.

Assignment review tool

Instructor feedback is important to students in the online classroom and can be an important avenue for creating meaningful connections between students and instructors, especially when the instructor personalizes the feedback. Steele and Holbeck (2018) cite a study that students feel more connected to the instructor when the instructor makes an effort to personalize their courses. They recommend audio or video feedback as important elements that personalize feedback. FeedbackFruits' assignment review tool provides a powerful opportunity to personalize feedback and connect with students, especially when students are invited to dialogue with the instructor about the comments and reflect on the assignment and feedback.

Education professor, Dr. Elizabeth Johnson, used the FeedbackFruits assignment review tool by providing personalized feedback to students where it would be most effective for them to review. She wanted to provide her students with comments about their videotaped teaching experiences in the field rather than only overall comments about the content of the video. She said, "Before they would upload and would have my notes, would pause and timestamp, and then they'd have a big, long list of info at the end, and it just wasn't as effective" (Hasan, 2023).

The assignment review tool allowed Dr. Johnson to watch a video, stop, leave comments, then continue through the video, thus allowing students to review the comments at the place where Dr. Johnson wanted to provide them. The tool also allowed students to reply to the instructor comments and for the student


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and instructor to have a critical discussion about specific parts of the recorded lesson, "We had a discussion over their lesson, over specific moments, and not just an overall view. It allowed for more conversation, and we definitely noticed the difference" (Hasan, 2023).

We suggest that instructors also use the reflection option, which prompts students to reflect on what they learned through the assignment, the instructor's feedback, and how they might use the feedback to prepare for further course assignments.

Our experience with the FeedbackFruits team

The team at FeedbackFruits has been instrumental in helping us adopt their tool suite. At purchase, we were assigned account representatives who met with us weekly and trained our instructional course designers and LMS administrators on faculty training as well as LMS integration. The team also conducted learning sessions for faculty, where they learned how to use the tools and provided one-on-one assistance to our faculty. The FeedbackFruits team kept us informed about current adoption rates, how many professors were using the product in their classes, how many students were accessing the lessons within their course. They also discussed strategies to help us increase tool usage in Brightspace/D2L.

We are in our second year with FeedbackFruits and we have seen an increase in the number of faculty and students using the tools. The students are showing overall satisfaction with the tools used in their courses. In our current biweekly meetings with the FeedbackFruits team, we discuss strategies to increase tool usage, best practices for various tools, and more. Early adopters are now adopting more tools and we have been able to tap into their experiences to motivate other instructors to grow in their usage of FeedbackFruits. Overall, our experience with FeedbackFruits tool suite has increased student satisfaction with their courses and increased instructor presence within the courses.

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Progressive Reliance on Primary Literature as a Trojan Horse for Critical Thinking

Leontine L. Galante

In a climate of ever-increasing availability of and reliance upon web resources, one of the biggest challenges facing undergraduate educators is the development and nurturing of critical thinking. The importance of this skill transcends disciplines and is still demanded in graduate and professional schools, as well as the subsequent workforce. As Generation Z "digital natives" enter undergraduate classrooms, however, a trend toward caution around data interpretation, troubleshooting, and analytical reasoning is observed (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018). Gen Z students are characterized as being technologically savvy learners who may nonetheless lack information literacy (Chicca & Shellenbarger). Therefore, while information is ubiquitous, the ability to discern quality over less well-supported resources is often lacking. In addition to these students being intellectually cautious, the effects of the pandemic on higher education can be felt in Gen Z undergraduates being prone to social isolation and needing more frequent feedback and encouragement from their instructors. To play to the strengths and needs of the current generation of undergraduates, recent studies have suggested success with active learning. Meta-analyses of traditional versus active learning in STEM classrooms have revealed lower failure rates and increased performance on traditional assessments when problem-based learning strategies are employed (Freeman et al., 2014). Additionally, Bonney (2015) suggests that case studies, particularly those created by the faculty teaching the course, enhance analytical skills, cognitive learning, and practical application in this student demographic. Taken together, the best way to enhance the critical thinking skills of a post-pandemic, internet-savvy generation of learners is for instructors to rely on an active learning approach.

To help remove some of these barriers and encourage a willingness to grapple with challenging primary literature, I propose a curriculum that expects progressively more student input and ingenuity as semesters proceed. Here, I suggest a series of disease-based case study projects that are of practical interest and rely heavily on peer-reviewed literature, group collaboration, and frequent, personalized feedback. These assignments slowly but increasingly demand more student independent thought and input in a way that students hardly recognize in the short term but that nonetheless trains them in critical thinking in the long term. The assignments represent a higher percentage of the final grade as the semesters proceed. While I will speak to my experience at a small university whose cohort of students follows me through several semesters of course-work, this approach can be universally applied, regardless of discipline and even within the course of a single semester.

At the 100 level: piquing interest

In the 100-level introductory biology class, this process is initiated by a semester-long, independent laboratory project in which students ask a scientific question based on their interests and design and perform a simple experiment to test it. The project is incremental. First, they propose a hypothesis, then a literature search shows how their question fits into the bigger context of the field. An experimental methodology is then suggested and independently performed by small groups of students, and at the end of the semester, each student gives a poster presentation to a group of their peers. This project calls upon all aspects of the scientific method, from hypothesis formation through peer review; however, it is the first indication to students that they are active participants in the scientific process and that their ideas can contribute to an ever-growing body of knowledge. It is the hope their being able to choose a topic that interests them will generate enthusiasm for this method as well.

At the 200 level: introducing peer-reviewed literature

In 200-level molecular biology, I introduce the case study approach with primary literature being the source of information that connects molecular mechanisms to diseases of interest, such as Friedreich's ataxia and dyskeratosis congenita. Throughout a single semester, there are three case studies that expect an increasing amount of student analysis concomitant with point value. At the start of the semester, the expectation is that students will begin to understand a peer-reviewed paper on the disease at hand and experimental approaches used in the field. Their understanding is assessed by a summary that recapitulates the "abstract" of a scientific paper and methods section with an example in another paper to establish its universality, and with a bigger-picture "discussion." Early assignments immerse the students in the literature without expecting as much critique. By the final case study of the semester, the focus and expectation has shifted to students both reading methodologies *and* finding less-than-ideal approaches. They are asked to weigh in on whether they agree with the conclusions drawn in the published article and conclude the assignment by offering suggestions of future directions.

At the 300 level: critiquing peer-reviewed literature

The focus in 300-level cell biology disease-based studies shifts toward discerning a biological mechanism from published data and finding further data that either supports or refutes a proposed model. If data and theory do not match, students are challenged to suggest and design experiments that would elucidate a well-supported theory. As they learn to synthesize data from multiple sources into a viable model, they begin to develop the judgment based on their own interpretations. By the end of the semester, the final exam is replaced by a mock National Institute of Health (NIH) grant, the main funding source in a biomedical research lab, formatted as an actual grant would be. This project is based on cell biology lecture-based information (e.g., glioblastoma), but the goal is to propose a novel and mechanistically sound treatment. Students must provide specific aims, a project narrative, and a research strategy; as with a true NIH grant, their ideas are entirely their own, as synthesized from the literature. This project represents a significant body of their own work, based entirely on their own ideas with literature backup, as it would be in a true research lab. This final synthesis of ideas is a significant challenge for students, and indeed researchers on any level, and would not be possible on the undergraduate level without the significant intellectual risks born out of the proceeding semesters of stepwise assignments.

In summary, the milieu that Gen Zers experience predisposes them to be cautious about critical thinking and relying on their own intellectual judgments. Additionally, social isolation and the need for frequent feedback characterize these undergraduate students. The key to challenging these students to push past these barriers is to introduce critical thinking with slow and manageable assignments that expect an incremental increase in their novel input and continually pique interest with practical application. In this way, they willingly and nonthreateningly move past traditional lecture-based modalities to rely more heavily on critical analysis and understanding. The universal value of this outcome transcends disciplines and sets these students up for success in approaching the challenges inherent to any career path.

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Enhancing Inclusivity through a Praxis of Mutual Care

Lindsay R. Onufer and Lizette A. Muñoz Rojas

Emergency remote instruction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to increased faculty and student feelings of isolation and burnout. The primary response of many higher ed institutions has been to encourage instructors to adopt self-care practices and to more fully embrace caring classroom practices and teaching strategies.

Arguments for adopting an ethic of care in education are hardly new. Four decades' worth of literature on care-based pedagogies relies on key characteristics connected to attention to the needs of others, compassion, responsiveness, and mutuality (Monchinski, 2010; Noddings, 2013). While recent calls for care—specifically self-care—are well-meaning, they place a disproportionate burden of delivering care on individuals, particularly those at the intersection of minoritized identities. This approach can undermine relational, community-oriented care. To address the needs of both teachers and learners, we propose embracing an ethic of mutual care in our classrooms.

In our approach, we reclaim central features of adopting an ethic of care in education—such as attention to the needs of others, compassion, responsiveness, and mutuality—and engage in the critical evaluation of our current context. We propose that an inclusive and equitable approach to teaching requires that we recognize the reality of the student-instructor relationship as one that involves folks who hold unequal power. We must examine and reimagine care, not as a one-size-fits-all, blanket policy, but as an approach that rests upon the shared responsibility of students and instructors to care for each other.

We can visualize the concept of care as a spectrum, with one far end firmly entrenched in highly individualistic self-interests and the other far end concerned with a highly abstract, universalist view that assumes that humans are a collection of independent equals. Our view of care operates somewhere in the middle of this spectrum and is concerned with praxis (see Figure 1). On the one hand, we have self-care as a call to look more deliberately after our physical, emotional, and mental health; on the other, we have mutual care as a type of care that does not deny or question the positive impact of self-care but calls for a shared responsibility to attend to the needs of *all* within a group. Addressing the needs of all members of a diverse group requires adopting a critical perspective that values trust and reciprocity. This critical lens allows us to understand how our many intersecting social identities shield us or make us more vulnerable to imbalances of power generated by larger societal forces, such as racism, sexism, ableism, and other forms of intolerance and inequity that are at play in our everyday lives.

Praxis of critical mutual care

We propose that a praxis of critical mutual care should consist of three categories of teaching strategies derived from critical pedagogies and pedagogies of care (Monchinski, 2010; Noddings, 2013): sharing power, cultivating community care, and fostering learning autonomy.

These categories overlap. All are rooted in mutuality and include approaches that are beneficial to the instructor and students, inclusive, and give students more agency over and responsibility for their learning. Implementing this praxis requires cultivating trust between instructors and students and working collaboratively to create a learning community that allows all members to engage with one another successfully.

To help you consider how you might enact or expand on these types of strategies in your own courses, below we describe each category of mutual care praxis and list of guiding questions and examples compiled from literature on inclusive, caring teaching (Addy et al., 2021; Mehrota, 2021); our own experiences; and a collaboratively created Padlet developed during the 2022 Teaching Professor Online Conference.

SHARING POWER

Sharing power requires instructors to acknowledge and disrupt traditional classroom power dynamics by ceding some decision-making about course content, activities, practices, and assessments to students so that they can collaborate as a community to design their learning experiences. The degree to which and how instructors and students share power can vary. These types of strategies can be as simple as giving students choices on topics that they research and write about or as complex as codesigning curriculum and assessments with students.

Guiding questions

- How are decisions made in your class? By whom? Why?
- Who is represented, heard, included, and centered in curriculum and during classes?
- How do students contribute to the design of their learning experiences?

Strategies

- Work with your class to collaboratively develop or revise course policies, discussion guidelines, assignments, or grading tools.
- Ask students to propose course materials, such readings or videos, that relate to their interests.
- Provide instruction and modeling so that students can take turns leading class discussions or peer teaching.

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY CARE

Inside and outside the classroom, care can disproportionately fall to a few individuals. Systemic inequities shape who may be tasked with delivering the most care. Members of minoritized groups are often expected or required to express care more. For example, faculty of color are often expected to do the bulk of the mentoring for students of color. Cultivating community care shifts the responsibility of care from individuals to the classroom community. Care should be reciprocal and generated in all classroom interactions.

Guiding questions

- How do you model, communicate, and encourage
  - support for students?
  - the creation and maintenance of boundaries?
  - learning as a collaborative process?
  - belonging and connectedness?

Strategies

- Adopt, model, and encourage growth mindset practices, such as productive mistake making.
- Build a set quantity of mutual grace periods to allow extra time for assignment submissions or email replies.
- In preparation for group projects, ask students to create group compacts, which can address preferred communication methods, roles, tasks, and how group members can support each other and hold one another accountable.

FOSTERING LEARNING AUTONOMY

In this context, autonomy is complementary to community and refers to providing students with the resources and experiences they need to develop agency and independence when learning. These types of strategies empower students to become more active learners, which can help them achieve more academic success in our courses and beyond. Students' familiarity with the unwritten, implicit academic and social messages they are expected to absorb, also known as the hidden curriculum, varies just as much as their own individual needs. That is why these strategies must be flexible enough to accommodate their diversity and differences.

Guiding question

- How do you scaffold learning experiences to encourage students to work toward more autonomous learning?
- How do you use reflection or meta-learning in your classes?
- How do you reveal the hidden curriculum to students?

Strategies

- Ask students to create learning journals to document progress toward achieving learning goals or to reflect and track the practices that help them learn
- Encourage students to use collaborative online spaces like Discord or Google Docs to create class FAQs or study guides.
- Incorporate opportunities for students to self-assess their work, particularly on formative assessments.
- Our contexts and identities, professional and personal, may affect our ability to plan and implement new teaching strategies. Instructors planning to test or expand critical mutual care practices should consider how their institutional contexts and positionality may affect the opportunities, barriers, and sustainability of different approaches. It may be helpful to start by implementing a single strategy or part of a strategy, reviewing academic performance data and student feedback, then revising and scaling up. The process of enacting this praxis should be iterative and reflective.

Conclusion

The need for care-based praxes remains as relevant and urgent as ever. But models of care that rely on instructors to provide most of the care in a learning environment, both for themselves and for their students, may ultimately exacerbate rather than alleviate feelings of burnout, especially for minoritized faculty. Instructors cannot and should not be expected to self-care their way out of the teaching challenges we are currently facing. It is crucial that we advocate for and build practices that cultivate mutual care in the classroom.

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