Equipping Students to Overcome Challenges
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Students face a wide variety of challenges: personal, social, and academic. Some challenges are associated with social context such as racism, sexism, poverty, being a first-generation college student. Those challenges can reduce the mental bandwidth students have available for learning (Verschelden, 2017). In this session, we discuss three ways of helping students overcome challenges: reminding students of sources of support, building genuine (not foolish) hope, and emphasizing learning over performance.

Reminding Students of Sources of Support

Participants generated examples of sources of support for students on their campuses. When sharing the sources of support, be sure to normalize support seeking. We shared a syllabus statement based on the following quotation from *Designing a Motivational Syllabus* (Harrington & Thomas, 2018): "Successful people access support from others as needed. [Institution] has many supportive services that can help you as you strive to achieve your goals. I encourage you to reach out to me or other professionals on campus. Here's some information about the resources available to you."

In addition to reminding students of support services in the syllabus, instructors can also identify relevant support services on assignments. Transparent assignments include information about the purpose, task, and grading criteria. We suggested adding sources of support as a fourth category of information to provide on assignments. The work on transparent assignments was spearheaded by Mary-Ann Winkelmes at UNLV. She has a nice 8-minute video explaining her work at https://youtu.be/xqUQhSKmD9U. Resources to help you create your own transparent assignments, include a template and examples, can be found at http://bit.ly/2xIyoXJ or https://www.unlv.edu/provost/transparency/tilt-higher-ed-examples-and-resources

The instructor is a particularly valuable source of support for students, but office hours are often underutilized. We suggested sending out a text message at the beginning of office hours reminding students to come. One handy tool for sending texts to all your students without them knowing your cell-phone number is Remind.com. Other ways of encouraging students to utilize office hours include labeling them "student hours" to clarify that the time is meant for students to ask questions rather than a time for faculty to work quietly in their office. Others hold office hours in other places (e.g., campus center, coffee shop, library).

Building Genuine (Not Foolish) Hope

Genuine hope involves both a sense of ability to meet goals and the identification of pathways to do so; foolish hope is the belief that things will get better without any idea of how that will happen (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, 2002). Instructors can build hope by helping students identify multiple pathways to meeting the goal of course success. To demonstrate how instructors might do this, we walked them through an activity in which they identify a goal, identify pathways to that goal, and identify ways of managing obstacles.

We concluded the session by asking participants to write down a specific goal: one thing they plan to do to implement something they learned during this session. Participants were then asked to answer the following questions: 1) When will you do this? 2) Where will you be when you do this? 3) What will you do to make sure you remember to do it? Research has shown that having specific implementation plans increases the chances that people will take the actions needed to meet their goals (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006; Halvorson, 2011).

Emphasizing Learning Over Performance

We often tell students we want them to focus on learning rather than performance, but we reward/grade performance. Worse, some of the performance we reward is unrelated to learning such as mastering the material the first time they are tested over it and turning work in on time. Possible solutions include using providing flexibility in due dates and providing second chances on exams and assignments.

Examples from Syllabi

In order to provide examples of ways of equipping students to overcome barriers, we have made three psychology syllabi available online: Research Methods, Personality, and Social Psychology.

The Research Methods syllabus provides examples of make-up assignments for in-class reading quizzes (p. 3), two tries on online quizzes (p. 3), and cumulative exams in which improved performance on later exams replaces earlier lower grades (p. 3). This syllabus reminds students of support that are linked to specific types of assignments. For example, resources are provided for "being successful on quizzes and exams" (p. 3) and for getting help on the bibliography and paper (p. 4).

The Personality syllabus provides examples of tokens (p. 3) that can be exchanged for second chances on papers and exams. This course is taught with specifications grading in which all work is graded pass/fail (Nilson, 2015). Available sources of support are provided (p. 8).

The Social Psychology syllabus includes information relevant to building genuine hope: goals (including if-then planning, p. 6), meta-cognitive learning strategies for reading (p. 5), how to get the most out of studying (p. 5), and Brian's ideas on how to help you learn (p. 5). Flexibility is built in by giving students a token that can be exchanged for one 72-hour extension (p. 9) and low-stakes weekly assignments (p. 9). Second chances on exams are provided through the use of a cumulative final (p. 3-4). Sources of support are also described (p. 6).

Recommended Books

Harrington, C., & Thomas, M. (2018). *Designing a motivational syllabus: Creating a learning path for student engagement*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Nilson, L. B. (2015). *Specifications grading: Restoring rigor, motivating students, and saving faculty time*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Verschelden, C. (2017). *Bandwidth recovery: Helping students reclaim cognitive resources lost to poverty, racism, and social marginalization*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

References

Gollwitzer, P. M., & Sheeran, P. (2006). Implementation intentions and goal achievement: A meta-analysis of effects and processes. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, *38*, 69-119.

Halvorson, H. G. (2011). The science of success: The if-then solution. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/201101/the-science-success-the-if-then-solution.

Mani, A., Mullainathan, S., Shafir, E., & Zhao, J. (2013). Poverty impedes cognitive function. *Science, 341*, 976-980.

Nilson, L. (2015). *Specifications grading: Restoring rigor, motivating students, and saving faculty time*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Snyder, C. R., Harris, C., Anderson, J. R., Holleran, S. A., Irving, L. M., Sigmon, S. T., … Harney, P. (1991). The will and the ways. Development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60*(4), 570-585.

Snyder, C. R., & Shory, H. S. (2002, Winter). Hope in the classroom: The role of positive psychology in academic achievement and psychology curricula. *Psychology Teacher Network, 12*(1).

Winkelmes, M., Bernacki, M., Butler, J., Zochowski, M., Golanics, J., & Weavil, K. H. (2016). A teaching intervention that increase underserved college students' success. *Peer Review, 18*(1/2), 31-36.