

WEEK 4

Articulating Your Pedagogic Rationales

How to Spend Your 5 to 15 Minutes Devoted to Student Success

Strategy 14: Remind Students What the Pedagogic Rationales Are for Your Syllabus Requirements and Grading Criteria

Take a few minutes in class to explain (again) why you give points for attendance, do not allow retakes on tests, or perhaps require rewrites on essays. Remind them why you grade the way you do, for example, docking points for not showing the work on a math problem, docking points for incomplete sentences, being picky about grammar and punctuation, requiring word-for-word definitions versus explanations in their own words. Explain the wisdom behind your general rules too, for example, not having open-book tests, allowing laptops, or in-class versus take-home exams.

STUDENT VOICES

"I think that professors have this thing where it's like they play this Guess What's in the Professor's Head game. That's the issue that I had with the professors I didn't like last semester. The first time we had to write a paper, she was just like, 'Write it.' And I got a 70 on it, and everybody got a 70 on it. We have no idea how you want it. She's like, 'This isn't how I wanted it.' You didn't tell us. You didn't tell us anything. Just never told us anything. . . . It was just guess what's in the teacher's head. Maybe you'll like this, maybe you won't."

Nicole, continuing-generation student
Private University
Middle class

Ethnoracial identity: "My mom is Native American and Black, and my dad is German. He's Jewish, but he's just white. I say I'm Black and white, and I'll throw in Native American because it sounds cool. Yeah, I'm half Black, half white."

"I got a 7 out of 10 on one of the credit/no credit assignments that I thought I did fine on. The teacher told me it wasn't long enough—but it could only fit on one paper. It was really confusing. I don't know. I thought 10 out of 10 would be credit because most of the people got 10 out of 10. I guess my header was too big for the paper. I don't know, because I did MLA format."

Ethan, first-generation student
Private University
Middle class

Ethnoracial identity: "When I am filling out those forms, I would put white, Caucasian."

RATIONALE

First-year students vary widely with regard to what they expect college academics to be like. Some find college easier than high school because they have so much more free time to get their work done or because they do not have to waste their energy on busywork. Meanwhile, others find it much harder than high school and are overwhelmed by the amount of work, the fast pace, and the entirely new grading criteria. Some want faculty to “baby” them, that is, to send reminders about due dates, forgive them when they forget to read instructions carefully, and allow them to retake tests and other second chances. Others are offended when faculty “treat them like children” by policing their behavior through policies such as mandatory attendance or not allowing laptops or cellphones in class. They expected to be treated with adult respect and responsibility in college. We should

STUDENT VOICES

“In high school, there was a lot of busywork like worksheets. . . . I think here it’s mainly keeping up with the readings and making sure you’re checking the syllabus. That was a major shock for me at first.”

Tomás, first-generation student

Private University

Middle class

Ethnoracial identity: “I am really proud to be Colombian. I love everything about our culture.”

STUDENT VOICES

“In high school, my teachers would be like, ‘You know what, Ilana? You turn in your work’—and I do! ‘Obviously when I sit next to you, you show me your work. I see you do it. I see that you understand it. Then you show me your exam, and it doesn’t reflect what you know. I’ll still give you points.’ And I would get the points. Here, it’s not like that. It’s not like that at all here. . . . It’s a shock. I’m working with it, but it’s still like, ‘Snap! That’s not how you roll here.’ No.”

Ilana, first-generation student

Public University

Low income

Ethnoracial identity: “Mexican.”

not attempt to meet all our students’ expectations, of course. However, it means that first-year students are often confused and frustrated by our academic expectations, policies, and grading styles. We can mitigate some of the hard feelings and resentment that gets built by simply explaining why we do what we do. (See the Introduction for a longer discussion.)

Things to Keep in Mind This Week

Focus on the words and phrases you use in class. Encourage students whose high schools did not give them good practice for college-level academics. Use phrases like “I know this stuff is hard” and “I know some of you are seeing this for the first time,” rather

than phrases such as “I know this is review for most of you.” See Strategy 6 in the Introduction.

Continually remind students of the tutoring centers and resources available on campus: give the locations and hours of the ones relevant to your class, and talk about tutoring as something that successful students utilize on a regular basis rather than something to do as a last resort. Show the websites of tutoring and resource centers briefly at the start or end of class (it can be showing on the projector as you prepare for class to start or as you collect your things at the end). Include resources such as your campus’s women’s center, diversity/multicultural center, LGBTQ center, and the like, as they are places where students can find community and mentor-like relationships with more advanced students who have insider experience on how to succeed on your campus. It is also helpful to add your violence prevention and wellness/counseling centers to the list of campus resources that you routinely talk about. See Chapters 2, 5, and 6. You might also consider inviting a representative from any of those centers to come and talk to your class.

Further Resources

“Closing the Social Class Achievement Gap for First-Generation Students in Undergraduate Biology,” by Judith M. Harackiewicz, Elizabeth A. Canning, Yoi Tibbetts, Cynthia J. Giffen, Seth S. Blair, Douglas I. Rouse,

and Janet S. Hyde, in *Journal of Educational Psychology* 106 (2) (2014): 375–389.

“‘Is That Paper Really Due Today?’: Differences in First-Generation and Traditional College Students’ Understandings of Faculty Expectations,” by Peter J. Collier and David L. Morgan, in *Higher Education* 55 (4) (2008): 425–446.

“(No) Harm in Asking: Class, Acquired Cultural Capital, and Academic Engagement at an Elite University,” by Anthony Abraham Jack, in *Sociology of Education* 89 (1) (2016): 1–19.

The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom, 3rd edition, by Stephen D. Brookfield (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2015). See chapter 4 for an explicit discussion of the usefulness of clarifying our pedagogic rationales.

Taking College Teaching Seriously: Pedagogy Matters! Fostering Student Success through Faculty-Centered Practice Improvement, by Gail O. Mellow, Diana D. Woolis, Marissa Klages-Bombich, and Susan Restler (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2015).

“The Unwritten Rules of Engagement: Social Class Differences in Undergraduates’ Academic Strategies,” by April Yee, in *Journal of Higher Education* 87 (6) (2016): 831–858.