

What Students Won't Expect: *Transitioning into First-Year Coursework*

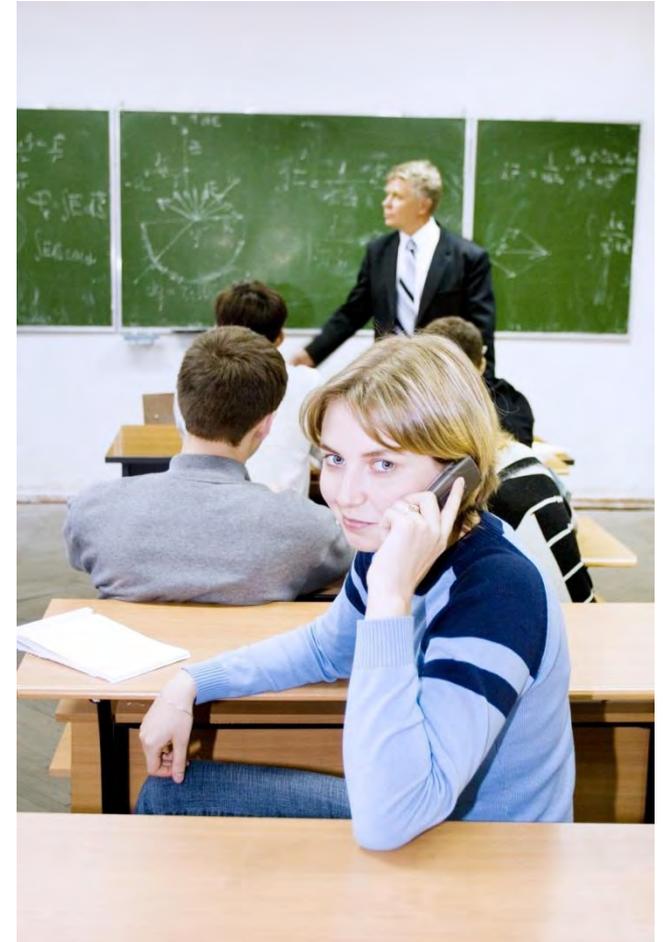
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Overview

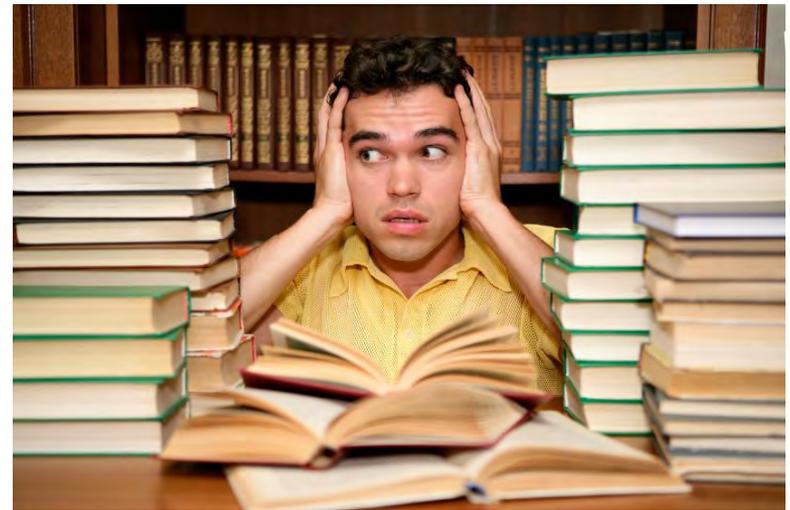
- Student expectations vs. realities
- Communication gaps between students and teachers
- Critical Thinking
- Critical Reading



Realities of the First Year

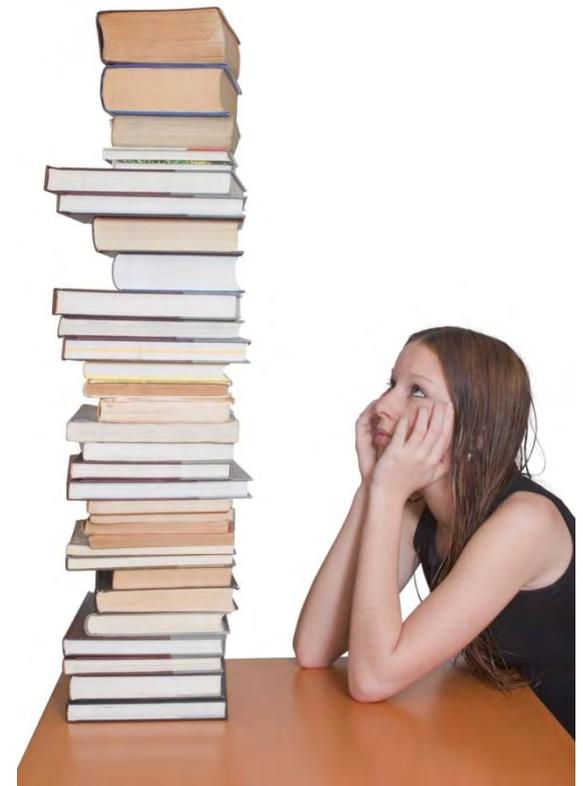
Data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

- 68% of UW students report they did less than 4 hours of homework per week in the year before they started college
- 45% report needing remedial work in math in their first year
- 30% report needing remedial work in science
- 20% report needing remedial work in writing (63% report being somewhat or very unprepared for First Year Composition in Student Opinion Survey, 2007)



Student Struggles in First Year

- Adjusting to college expectations
 - Workload
 - Time management
 - Homesickness
 - Social Integration



Importance of Bridging Gaps

- Students depart college largely because of “expectation failure”
- Gaps promote resentment between college and high school teachers
- Diversification of entering college students can prompt teacher frustration toward “remediation”

Preparing Students for Transition

- Represent the time and challenge of a typical mid-semester week in the first week (readings, homework, class preparation)
- Discuss homework habits with students; consider bringing in a panel of former students to present their strategies and potential pitfalls
- Include key course management tips on the syllabus, including planner use, homework time, study tips, etc.
- Brainstorm with students potential obstacles to student learning, symptoms that may appear in class, and potential approaches to the most obvious

Communication Between Teachers and Students

- 19% of faculty felt that more than half the students in any given class asked questions or contributed to class discussion
- 97% of students felt that they asked questions or contributed to discussions in class



Communication Between Teachers and Students

- 23% of faculty reported that freshman “frequently work harder than they usually do to meet the standards of the class”
- 49% of freshmen reported that they often or very often work harder than they thought they could to meet an instructors’ expectations

Communication Between Teachers and Students

- 70% of faculty in a LeaRN survey indicated that they are occasionally or often surprised by inappropriate informality in communications from students in emails, discussion, or online postings (n=275)
- 25% of students “always alter formality” when they communicate with faculty (n=719)

From: soccergrrrl@whatever.com

Sent: Monday, April 14, 2008 12:28 PM

To: William Smith

Subject:

Hiya smith

can you tell me what i got on the xam? when ru going to post the grades?

p.s. i won't be in class tomorrow so can i get the notes :P

Communication Between Teachers and Students

- 74% of students reported they have difficulty accepting criticism occasionally or often during the semester
- Only 10% of students reported they often disagree with instructor criticism



Approaches to Communication

- Design discussion guidelines with students: agree what it means to “participate in class”
- Include communication guidelines for email and addressing the instructor in the syllabus and in class discussion
- Be aware of the “criticism experience” students bring to the class and discuss ways to bridge this gap with students

Feedback

Millennial students process feedback best when

- Feedback acknowledges student work on the process and existing strengths
- Instructor communicates concern for student understanding, progress, and success
- Suggestions center on several concrete areas for improvement
- Tutoring help, support center opportunities are presented when relevant

Critical Thinking: Analysis and Synthesis

- 22% of faculty felt their courses emphasized “memorizing facts, ideas, or methods”
- 64% of students felt their courses emphasized “memorizing facts, ideas, or methods”

Critical Thinking

- 69% of faculty report that they prompted examination of the strengths or weaknesses of multiple views often
- 49% of students report that they examined the strengths or weaknesses of views on an issue often

Critical Thinking

- Don't forget the drama!
- Help students understand and accept discomfort in learning academic and critical discourse
- Make frequent opportunities for guided practice
- Provide and dig into successful examples of high-stakes work
- Connect with community work

Role Playing

- Build in early opportunities for role-playing
 - Responding to readings
 - Imagined dialogues with authors or public figures
 - Double-entry logs representing students' own and others' responses to a text
 - Panel discussions with moderators (all in “roles”)
 - Teacher modeling through presentations in another “role”



Critical Reading

- 40% of incoming college students in Wyoming are unprepared for college reading (ACT 2007)
- “Reading First” program sponsored by No Child Left Behind impedes secondary teachers’ ability to teach critical reading
- 17 year olds in U.S. are reading less, seeing reading less at home, and having more difficulty reading and interpreting specialized texts
 - (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2005*)

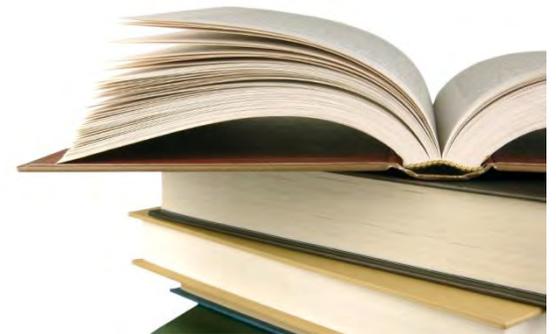


Critical Reading Challenges

- College teachers have little or no training in teaching reading
- The curriculum leaves little room for teaching reading
- Students are overwhelmed by the amount and complexity of readings in college

Approaches: Teaching Critical Reading

- Include a discussion of reading on the syllabus
- Integrate a reading and/or writing “autobiography” early in the course
- Approach reading as a process—not something students just “do” or “don’t do”
- Help students engage with the reading, anticipating how it relates to them personally and what they will struggle with
- Make students accountable for reading assignments in meaningful ways



Approaching the External Reading Process

- Highlight reading goals on the course syllabus
- Talk about the transition to college-level reading and brainstorm the benefits of improving reading practices and skills
- Brainstorm and develop key approaches for reading successfully (students can reflect on individual needs)
- Include reading process discussions in teacher conferences
- Ask students to reflect periodically on their reading process and its evolution during the semester

Approaching the Internal Reading Process

- **Planning:** developing goals and understanding the purpose for the reading, having initial questions answered, and recognizing the background knowledge that may be necessary for understanding.
- **Drafting:** reading through the first time and creating initial impressions and reactions to the text, determining the best strategy for reading, and **grasping the text's main points (also identifying important vs. less important material)**
- **Revising:** pausing to reflect on the reading and one's own reaction to the text, assessing as much as **possible one's own understanding of the text**, accessing background knowledge that may be important to responding to and interpreting the text, and generating responses, opinions, and new ideas

Connective Thinking

- Course themes improve critical thinking and reading development
- **“Paired texts” that exemplify verbal/informal and academic/formal language spur the reading process more productively**
- **“Paired texts” can also include visual texts, media texts, and guest speakers**

Student Needs, Best Practices

- Active Learning
- Multi-modal approaches to learning and lecture
- Choice
- Connection across subjects/courses

- Questions?

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