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.

UW NSSE Results
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)

LeaRN Survey, 2007
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

LeaRN Survey, 2007
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

UW NSSE Results
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
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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