

# Unlocking the Secrets to Student Engagement

Alex O'Brien, Psychology  
Brian Udermann, CATL

Tuesday, 6/15/10

# The Goal

- To provide you with practical suggestions for keeping students interested and engaged

# The Approach

- Themes:
  - ▣ Respect for students
  - ▣ Enthusiasm for the material
  - ▣ Preparedness
- General Philosophy
- Specific strategies

# Why Student Engagement is Good

- Arousal facilitates learning.<sup>1</sup>
- Interest in the material facilitates retention.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(Yerkes-Dodson, 1908; Bahrck et al., 1998)

<sup>2</sup>(Morris, Tweedy, & Gruneberg, 1985; Herrmann, Crawford, & Holdsworth, 1992)

# Respect for Students

## Philosophy

- Students who feel respected by their instructors act respectfully and responsibly.
- ▣ Behavioral Confirmation: A type of self-fulfilling prophecy wherein expectations about an individual lead the individual to act in a manner that confirms those expectations.<sup>3</sup>
- ▣ “Set the stage” upon which you wish to have your students act.

<sup>3</sup>(Snyder & Klein, 2005; Klein & Snyder 2003; Merton, 1968; Wiseman)

# Respect for Students

## Practical Techniques:

- Try to learn as many student names as possible
  - ▣ Ask for pictures on D2L
- Try to answer student emails as promptly as possible

# Respect for Students

## Practical Techniques:

- Reinforce involvement
  - ▣ Reinforcement increases the prevalence of behaviors
- Recognize that students struggle for *many* reasons
  - ▣ Fundamental Attribution Error<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>(Jones & Harris, 1967; Napolitan & Goethals, 1979)

# Which student email is the least preferable?

A) Hey,  
I missed class yesterday. Did I miss anything important?

---

B) Hi Prof,  
I just checked my final grade, and I see that I missed a passing grade by 4%. I have to pass this class to graduate. I know the semester's over, but what can I do to bring my grade up?  
Thanks.

---

C) when r u gonna post ur notes?

---

D) Hi Dr. X,  
I saw that grades are posted, and that I got zeros for the quizzes I missed during the week that I decided to go to Aculpoco. I sent you an email while I was gone--why didn't I get the points? I'm very disappointed by this...I take my grades very seriously.

# Enthusiasm for the material

## Philosophy

- Enthusiasm is contagious, and individuals more effectively store information when they find the information personally interesting.

# Enthusiasm for the material

## Practical Techniques

- Try to find a student-relevant example for ***each and every*** principle you discuss in class.<sup>5</sup>
  - ▣ Identify lecture components that students traditionally find difficult, and develop (additional) real-life student-relevant examples to illustrate the principles.
  - ▣ Emphasize how the difficult principles fit with the larger picture of the topic/discipline.

<sup>5</sup>(Woloshyn et al., 1990)

# Enthusiasm for the material

## Practical Techniques

- Search for examples that others have used to make the material more interesting.
- Utilize demonstrations that require the participation of all students.
- Reinvigorate your own interest in the material with a brief review before lecturing.

# Preparedness

## Philosophy

- Organization gives students a sense of control and responsibility.
- Organized material is easier to store and retrieve.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>(Collins & Quillian, 1969; Roediger, 1973)

# Preparedness

## Practical Techniques

- Pretest new demonstrations or equipment
- Develop an obvious predictable routine for class
  - ▣ Start and end class promptly
  - ▣ Question/answer session to begin class
  - ▣ Interaction/questions every 8-10 minutes
  - ▣ Present information in a patterned manner

# Additional Tips for Engagement

- Move around the room
- Use a remote to control the presentation
- Leave the students wanting more
  - ▣ End class with an intrinsically interesting question--try to keep the students thinking about the topic until the next class meeting

# Ideas for your lectures

- Identify hard-to-understand topics, and generate multiple student-relevant examples to illustrate the concepts.
- Reorganize difficult content to “tell a story.”
- Insert student-centered demonstrations/activities/questions every 8-10 minutes.
- Develop an interesting “thought experiment” with which to end each lecture.

Thank you!

Have a great afternoon!

