

## THE ROLE OF FACULTY IN STUDENT RETENTION

“Student-faculty interaction has a stronger relationship to student satisfaction with the college experience than any other involvement variable, or indeed, any other student or institutional characteristic.”

– Alexander Astin, UCLA HERI

“Students who have frequent contact with faculty members in and out of the class during their college years are more satisfied with their educational experiences, are less likely to drop out, and perceive themselves to have learned more than students who have less faculty contact.”

- K. Patricia Cross, *About Campus*, 1998

“There is no decent, adequate, respectable education, in the proper sense of that much-abused word, without personal involvement by a teacher with the needs and concerns, academic and personal of his/her students. All the rest is ‘instruction’ or ‘information transfer’, but it is not teaching and the student is not truly learning.”

- Page Smith, *Killing the Spirit*, 1990

## 63 STEPS FACULTY CAN TAKE TO IMPROVE STUDENT RETENTION

### Faculty/Student Interaction

This category contains elements directly related to the affective domain of student growth brought about by faculty/student interaction. Psych, ego, individual worth are all intricately bound within this framework.

1. Learn the name of each student as quickly as possible and use the student's name in class. Based upon the atmosphere you want to create:
  - a. Call on students by their first names.
  - b. Call on students by using Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms.
2. Tell the students by what name and title you prefer to be called (Prof., Dr., Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms, First Name).
3. At the end of each class period, ask one student to stay for a minute to chat (compliment on something: tell student you missed him/her if absent, etc.).
4. Instead of returning tests, quizzed, themes in class, ask students to stop by your office to pick them up. This presents an opportunity to talk informally with students.
5. Call students on the telephone if they are absent. Make an appointment with them to discuss attendance, make-up work, etc.
6. Get feedback periodically from students (perhaps a select few) on their perceptions of your attitudes toward them, your personal involvement, etc.
7. Socialize with students as your "style" permits by attending their clubs or social activities, by having lunch with them, by walking with them between classes, etc.
8. Conduct a personal interview with all students sometime during the semester.
9. Provide positive reinforcement whenever possible; give students a respectful answer to any question they might ask.
10. Listen intently to students' comments and opinions. By using a "lateral thinking technique" (adding to ideas rather than dismissing them), students feel that their ideas, comments, and

opinions are worthwhile.

11. Be aware of the difference between students' classroom mistakes and their personal successes/failures.
12. Be honest about your feelings, opinions, and attitudes toward students and toward the subject matter. Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know all the answers. If a student tells you something in confidence, respect that confidence. Avoid making value judgments (verbally or non-verbally) about these confidences.
13. Lend some of your books (reference) to students and borrow some of theirs in return. You can initiate the process by saying, "I've just read a great book on \_\_\_\_\_, would anyone like to borrow it?"
14. Give your telephone number to students and the location of your office.
15. A first class meeting, pair up the students and have them get acquainted with one another. Switch partners every five (5) minutes.
16. Have the students establish a "buddy" system for absences, work missed, assignments, tutoring, etc. Exchange telephone numbers; pair them by majors or geographical proximity.

### **General Classroom Management**

This section focuses literally on the day-to-day operations of your classes. The items as a group emphasize planning, orderliness, and general good sense.

1. Circulate around the class as you talk or ask questions. This movement creates a physical closeness to the students. Avoid standing behind the lectern or sitting behind the desk for the entire period. Do not allow the classroom to set up artificial barriers between you and the students.
2. Give each student a mid-term grade and indicate what each student must do to improve.
3. Tell the students (orally and in writing) what your attendance policy is. Make them aware of your deep concern for attendance and remind them periodically of the policy and the concern.
4. Conduct a full instructional period on the first day of classes. This activity sets a positive tone for the learning environment you want to set. Engage in some of the interpersonal activities listed elsewhere.
5. List and discuss your course objectives on the first day. Let students know how your course can fit in with their personal/career goals. Discuss some of the fears, apprehensions that both you and the students have. Tell them what they should expect of you and how you will contribute to their learning.
6. Let students know that the learning resources you use in class (slides, tapes, films) are available to them outside of class. Explain the procedures to secure the material, and take them to the area.
7. Have students fill out an index card with name, address, telephone number, goals, and other personal information you think is important.
8. If the subject matter is appropriate, use a pre-test to determine their knowledge, background, expertise, etc.
9. Return tests, quizzes, and papers as soon as possible. Write comments (+ and -) when appropriate.
10. Vary your instructional techniques (lecture, discussion, debate, small groups, films, etc.).
11. When you answer a student's question, be sure he/she understands your answer. Make the student repeat the answer in his/her own words.
12. Get to class before the students arrive; be the last one to leave.
13. Use familiar examples in presenting materials. If you teach rules, principles, definitions, and theorems, explicate these with concrete examples that students can understand.
14. If you had to miss a class, explain why and what you will do to make up the time and/or materials.
15. Clarify and have students understand what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior in a classroom. Be consistent in enforcing your rules.

16. Good eye contact with students is extremely important both in and out of class.
17. Allow students to switch classes if work schedules changes or other salient reasons develop. Cooperate with colleague if he/she makes such a request.
18. Be prepared to use an alternate approach if the one you've chosen seems to bog down. You should be confident enough with your own material so that student interests and concerns, not lecture notes, determine the format of instruction.
19. Throughout the course, but particularly during the crucial first class sessions:
  - a. stress a positive "you can handle it" attitude
  - b. emphasize your willingness to give individual help
  - c. point out the relevancy of your subject matter to the concerns and goals of your students
  - d. capitalize on opportunities to praise the abilities and contributions of students whose status in the course is in doubt; well-timed encouragement could mean the difference between retention and attrition
  - e. utilize a variety of instructional methods, drawing on appropriate audio-visual aids as much as possible
  - f. urge students to talk to you about problems, such as changes in work schedule, before dropping your course. Alternate arrangements can often be made.
20. Distribute an outline of your lecture notes before class starts. This approach assists students in organizing the material you are presenting.
21. If you require a term paper or research paper, you should take the responsibility of arranging a library orientation. Librarians would be happy to cooperate.
22. Have the counselors visit your classes to foster an awareness of counseling.

### **Student-Initiated Activities**

This category is based on the premise that peer influence can play a substantial role in student success. Age differences, personality differences, and skill differences can be utilized to produce positive results if you can get the students to work with one another.

1. Have students read one another's papers before they turn them in. This activity could help them locate one another's errors before being graded.
2. If the class lends itself to a field trip, have the students plan it and make some or all of the arrangements.
3. Ask students to submit sample test questions (objective or subjective) prior to a test. The class itself can compose a test or quiz based on your objectives.
4. Create opportunities for student leaders to emerge in class. Use their leadership skills to improve student performance.
5. If students are receiving tutoring help, ask them to report the content and results of their tutoring.
6. Have students set specific goals for themselves throughout the semester in terms of their learning and what responsibilities they will undertake.

### **Faculty-Initiated Activities**

This section presents the greatest challenge to the ability and creativity of each faculty member. You must take the initiative to implement these suggestions, to test them, and to device them.

1. Utilize small group discussions in class whenever feasible.
2. Take the initiative to contact and meet with students who are doing poor work. Be especially

- cognizant of the "passive" student, one who comes to class, sits quietly, does not participate, but does poorly on tests, quizzes, etc.
3. Encourage students who had the first part of a course to be in the second part together. Try to schedule the same time slot for the second course.
  4. Ask the Reading faculty to do a "readability study" of the texts you use in your classroom.
  5. Develop library/supplementary reading lists which complement course content. Select books at various reading levels.
  6. Use your background, experience, and knowledge to inter-relate your subject matter with other academic disciplines.
  7. Throughout the semester, have students submit topics that they would like to cover or discuss.
  8. Take students on a mini-tour of the learning resources center, reading/study skills area, counseling center, etc. If a particular student needs reading/study skills help, don't send him/her, TAKE him/her.
  9. Work with your division counselor to discuss procedures to follow-up absentees, failing students, etc.
  10. Use your imagination to devise ways to reinforce positively student accomplishments. Try to avoid placing students in embarrassing situations, particularly in class.
  11. Create situations in which students can help you (get a book for you from library, look up some reference material, conduct a class research project).
  12. Set up special tutoring sessions and extra classes. Make these activities mandatory, especially for students who are doing poorly.
  13. Confer with other faculty members who have the same students in class. Help reinforce one another.
  14. Look at your record book periodically to determine student progress (inform them) and determine if you know anything about that student other than his/her grades.
  15. Team teach a class with a colleague or switch classes for a period or two. Invite a guest lecturer to class.
  16. Use the library reference shelf for some of your old tests and quizzes. Tell the students that you will use some questions from the old tests in their next test.
  17. Engage in periodic (weekly) self-evaluation of each class. What was accomplished this past week? How did students react?
  18. At mid-term and at final exam, your last test question should ask if a student is going to continue at the college or drop out at the end of the semester. If a potential drop-out is identified, you can advise the student to work with the division counselor.

*"Relatively simple changes in teaching methods can produce significant gains in learning for college students."*

*- Harvard Assessment Seminar, 1990*