
Advice to Future Students

Framing the Active Learning Classroom

Objectives

To communicate beneficial study strategies in a way that does not feel autocratic – by letting students share ideas with the future class cohort.

Activity

At the end of the semester, ask your students to respond to the following prompt on a piece of paper or online if you are already doing a survey: “If you were to give advice to a fellow student starting this course, what would you suggest they do to be successful?” You don’t have to do this every semester, unless you’ve changed your course substantially, or are curious to see what students will say. The idea is to collect the responses and share them with your students at the beginning of the next time you teach this course.

I collect the responses and roughly categorize them. A lot of students say things like “keep up with the homework” “do all the practice problems” “go to office hours” – all things that I would encourage my students to do anyway. Some students say things like “pray” or “give up” which indicate they are frustrated, or sometimes funny things like “Dr. Knight is not too scary once you get to know her.” Humorous responses like this are helpful to lighten the mood on the first day and create a warm atmosphere.

I share a few examples of all the different kinds of quotes with the students early on in the semester (within the first week, or first day). It is helpful to hear from other students rather than using my own words to encourage them. I think it’s ok to show them that some people have great suggestions, but that others have given up or never figured out how to be successful, and that you want to help them figure out how NOT to be in that category.

Effectiveness

It only takes a few minutes, usually gets the students talking and laughing, and allows you to communicate some strategies with them from the mouths of other students just like them.

Author

Jenny Knight, University of Colorado Boulder

Materials & Resources

None

Classroom Context

Various biology classrooms

Time Requirement

10 minutes

About this Project

This is one of a set of materials compiled for instructors to draw upon in order to frame non-traditional modes of classroom teaching for their students. Our hope is that these materials can help reduce any student resistance to such techniques.

Compiled by Stephanie Chasteen (University of Colorado Boulder Science Education Initiative):
Stephanie.Chasteen@Colorado.EDU.

Other materials available online at www.colorado.edu/sei/fac-resources