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Teaching a College Freshman by Jonathan Saraga

Transitioning between high school and college can be an exciting yet daunting experience. Students, without the familiarity of their high school classrooms friends and teachers, are attempting to adapt to a new world of faces, large classroom environments, and freedoms. In this paper, we will explore various teaching methods that are specifically designed to enhance the classroom experience of a college freshman. By exploring the psyche of these individuals, we will be able to guide them through their transition into the unknown, and as educators, this is our duty.

Because a freshman may be overwhelmed while adapting to their new learning environment, it is important that we are there to make them feel more comfortable. This is done in a variety of ways: encouraging communication through consistent office hours and emails, being on a first name basis with each student, getting to know them personally, making ourselves approachable and outwardly portraying the passion we have for what we're teaching. We want the student to see how interested we are as teachers in the subject matter so that they may further realize their *own* interest. We are not there to force them to be interested, but are there to allow them to discover their own potential.

Eighteen year old's are still developing their work ethic, retention skills and awareness of responsibility. Therefore, in order to avoid misunderstandings about what is expected of them, we must eliminate any gray areas. In addition to a clear and concise syllabus, we must identify and address any requirements that we feel students may find vague. Hand outs that we create are useful tools because they provide the student with a visual aide that is specific to the material covered that day. These handouts allow the students to refer to when doing homework and preparing for an exam. Practice tests may also help to prepare students for the actual exam by providing them with an example of what is expected.

In a small classroom environment, it is important that the teacher regularly give each student individualized attention in order to further engage them and assess their learning. It is always important to encourage the student to ask questions, especially because many freshman are timid about speaking out in front of the class. In addition we must ask *them* questions, and from there answers, we can gage whether or not the material is being comprehended. In a large classroom setting however, it may be more difficult for students to feel comfortable interacting.

Many freshman never had to organize, retain, and comprehend as much information as is presented to them in a lecture. These classes may not provide them with the same individualized attention, but they can be supplemented with small group discussion. Students then have a chance to get to know each other through the sharing of thoughts and opinions related to the material, while we have the chance to summarize what has been covered thus far. By highlighting major points periodically during the

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class, we allow students ample time to organize the material in their own way, and to naturally formulate questions. Use of diagrams, graphs, pictures, or media can also help to stimulate their attention. Games and competitions using the material is also a fun way to engage everyone.

One of the main differences between high school and college is time management. Students must be much more responsible for monitoring their own learning and managing their own time. With a demanding work load and numerous distractions in their new environment, first year undergraduates often need structure and consistent feedback to help them stay focused. Establishing a routine for due dates using a weekly or bi-weekly pattern makes it easier for inexperienced students to set aside regular blocks of time for completing homework, papers or projects. In class reminders can also help students cope with their work loads, while they begin to develop better planning and time management skills. Freshmen tend to be more concerned with completing assignments quickly, rather than being concerned with whether or not they digested and retained the information. By conducting a group discussion or asking students to reflect on the material the day the assignment is due is an affective way of keeping students conscious of what they are actually learning about. Structuring the curriculum so that exams reflect the exact material from homework assignments may also can be a motivator for students to retain information.

How students structure their time can directly affect their class participation and attendance. As first year students learn to handle their new-found freedoms, many of them will experiment with skipping classes. As a teacher, we must be explicit about the importance of attending class, as well as make it clear that attending class is not optional. If we find that certain students are not attending class on a regular basis it is important to why so that we can help them find a solution. In order to avoid students missing class because of lack of interest, introducing new perspectives on the material allows students to see the importance of attending class. Beginning class on time is imperative so that students understand the importance of being prompt. Ending class on time as well will show that you understand and respect their schedules, just as you want yours to be respected.

All students benefit from increased active engagement in class, but first year undergraduates in particular have a lot to gain from it. Frequent opportunities to test a student's understanding and comprehension of the material can help them correct misconceptions quickly. Encouraging students to relate the material to prior knowledge and experience will engage them more in the class. When evaluating students' work, analyzing common mistake patterns and discussing them, instead of just putting a grade on the page, can help students to detect these patterns on their own and avoid similar problems in future work.

It is difficult to structure a freshman class at a level suitable for all students. Giving advanced students optional expansions on assignments can be a way of keeping them engaged and still working at the same pace as the rest of the class. At the same time

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there could be students that could fall behind. We must be conscious of the fact that freshman are facing increased workloads that must be completed in small periods of time. This stress, combined with the pressure to do well in school, can result in achieving the bare minimum, sloppily completing assignments, or even plagiarism. This is why it is important to be approachable, so that the student is not afraid to come to you in regards to a project extension.

Many freshman who were successful in high school, assume that they will continue to be as successful in college. For example a student that was the best at their instrument in high school may no longer be the best once they get to college. This may cause *them* emotional turmoil. It is important to be aware of the various adjustment issues a freshman can face, so that we can quickly assess an issue and already have ideas as to how they can overcome it. It is important to note that we cannot deal with first year students on an intellectual level only; they are social, emotional beings. Often they simply need reassurance or someone to just listen. Some will need a push in the right direction because they are not used to asking for help. A teacher in this position has to actively reach out to students because they often won't seek assistance on their own. It is practical for students that may have more experience in the subject matter to share their work with the rest of the class. Students that are developing at a slower pace will benefit from seeing the work done by one of their peers.

When teaching a freshman in a private lesson, the quality of the student-faculty relationship is most important. Both parties need to collaborate so that the student may gain as much as possible from the educational experience. It is important to find out during the first lesson what the student is interested in learning about but it is up to us to decide what we feel will benefit the student most at their current stage of development. We must be mindful that for many freshman it is the first time that they will be graded on the quality of work they do with their instrument. Besides a chance to work with a skilled player it is a chance for the student to learn about the different experiences we have had in the business world, a world they may not be that accustomed to.

As a teacher, it is important to be aware of the various issues a freshman may face when entering college. We must have compassion for them, but at the same time not pamper them and give them all the answers. We must maintain a firm position of authority in the classroom, while establishing interpersonal relationships with each student. We must be ready to deal with the different students' issues, and also with those who may be ahead of the rest of the class. Showing students our passion and interest in the material, and sharing our experiences will help them to foster their interests and create their own experiences. Making the class interesting, fun, and challenging will enable each student to come away from it having learned something new.

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