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dburns@magnapubs.com  
(608) 227-8109





## How to Prevent Paper Recycling

By Steve Broskoske,  
College Misericordia, PA  
sbroskos@misericordia.edu

Although recycling paper in the community may be a valued practice, the recycling of term papers by students is a highly unethical action and a problem that is growing to epidemic proportions. The Internet has taken the old term paper mills to a new level of convenience, now tempting both low achievers and the academically gifted. A teacher who is aware of the problem can help prevent this crime by making it more difficult for a student to commit.

### What is available online?

A quick search on Google for “term papers” nets over 2,500,000 related Web pages. Many online services boast of offering more than 30,000 term papers, book reports, and essays. The business of online term papers is so established that students can find meta sites such as TermPaperSites.com, for example, that direct them to the many paper mills and services available.

Although many online term paper mills advertise access to free papers, these companies are in the business to make money. The sites don’t actually charge for the papers. Instead, they charge a membership fee for the privilege of using the site for a specified period of time, usually one month. The sites that offer free papers actually offer free essays or position papers of lower quality. Once the student is duped into viewing the free essays, links navigate them to a pay site where they can purchase term papers. The charge for term papers is anywhere from \$10 to \$20 per page for delivery in a week, to \$50 per

page for 24-hour delivery.

Most sites include suggestions that help students make a plagiarized paper look like their own original work. Some offer papers at various levels of writing skill so that a student will not submit work that appears to be beyond his or her level. Even more alarming, many sites offer custom-written papers. Students supply the specific topic to research, the number of sources to use, the citation and writing style, and any other particulars of the assignment.

Unlike the old term paper mills, many of the online sites provide numerous options regarding paper delivery. Sites will fax or mail the paper, or e-mail it to allow for easy copy and paste. If a student orders a custom-written paper, a number of sites will even send photocopies of the sources used to create the paper.

To work around legal ramifications, term paper mills post legal disclaimers. Because they charge a membership fee, these sites are not technically selling papers; rather, they are selling memberships to view the papers for “research purposes.”

### What can teachers do to prevent this practice?

After students have submitted their papers, faculty can check the papers for the probability of plagiarism. Turnitin.com is a service that an instructor or an institution purchases a license to use. Students submit papers electronically through the service, and the papers are compared against a comprehensive digital repository of written material compiled from print and online sources.

A number of preventive strategies can be used beforehand to make it difficult for

a student to submit a recycled or custom-written term paper. I recommend doing the following before the final paper due date:

- Make the assignment unique, and include specific writing requirements such as a particular way of using headings or format for a discussion section.
- Partition the assignment, and have various parts of the paper due at different times during the course.
- Require students to submit a good-quality draft and then submit a revised draft along with the original in order to obtain a grade.
- If you can, meet with students to discuss their papers and monitor their progress.
- Early in the course, require another writing sample with which you can compare the quality and style of each student’s work.
- If you have access to online course tools, have students post information

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**Editor**

Maryellen Weimer, Ph.D.

Penn State Berks Campus  
P.O. Box 7009, Reading, PA 19610-7009  
Phone: 610-396-6170  
E-mail: grg@psu.edu

**Magna Editor**

Rob Kelly  
robkelly@magnapubs.com

**President**

William Haight  
whaight@magnapubs.com

**Publisher**

David Burns  
dburns@magnapubs.com

**Editorial Content Director**

Bob Bogda  
bbogda@magnapubs.com

**Creative Services Manager**

Mark Manghera

**Customer Service Manager**

Mark Beyer

**For subscription information, contact:**

Customer Service: 800-433-0499  
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- We are interested in innovative strategies, techniques, and approaches that facilitate learning and in reflective analyses of educational issues of concern.
- Write with the understanding that your audience includes faculty in a wide variety of disciplines and in a number of different institutional settings; i.e., what you describe must be relevant to a significant proportion of our audience.
- Write directly to the audience, remembering that this is a newsLETTER.
- Keep the article short; generally between 2 and 3 double-spaced pages.
- If you'd like some initial feedback on a topic you're considering, you're welcome to share it electronically with the editor.

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**Editor's note:**

*Two articles in this issue summarize recent research on participation. Fortunately, the last 15 years have seen a growing body of empirical work on this most important ingredient of effective discussions. For practitioners, this research work is especially valuable because it is applied—implications of the findings are clear. You can do something about them in class tomorrow!*

## To Call or Not to Call: That Continues to Be the Question

Ask a question and no one volunteers: Should you call on a student? You have a quiet but capable student who rarely or never participates: should you call on that student?

Views on the value of cold calling, as it's referred to in the literature, are mixed. Faculty who do call on a student whose hand is not raised do so for a variety of reasons. Not knowing when they might be called on keeps students more attentive and better focused on the content. Being called on and successfully responding may help develop students' confidence and motivate them to participate more. The quality of discussion improves when more people participate, and because research has documented what most of us have experienced—that only a few students regularly participate—calling on students adds to the conversation.

Some of those who don't call on students unless they volunteer do so because they want to encourage students to start taking responsibility for the quality of discussions that occur in class. More often, they hesitate because they know the process provokes considerable anxiety. Often the process diminishes confidence and the motivation to talk more in class.

In an interesting study of several aspects of the cold-calling approach, researchers solicited from faculty who do call on students a variety of strategies they use to make cold calling less "icy." Here's a brief summary of what they suggest:

- **Establish the expectation of participation**—Warn students that you will cold call. Discuss the importance of participation in class. Attach a grade to

participation.

- **Provide opportunities for reflecting and responding**—Give students time to prepare. Use appropriate amounts of wait time. Maybe let students write some ideas and/or share them with another student first.
- **Skillfully facilitate the discussion**—Set ground rules. Discuss what makes a "good" answer. Don't let a few students monopolize the discussion. Let students look at their notes or the text.
- **Use questions appropriately**—Ask open-ended questions. Call on those students who might have relevant experiences or background knowledge.
- **Create a supportive learning environment**—Let the classroom be a safe place where honest attempts to answer are supported and encouraged.
- **Respond respectfully to students' contributions**—Use wrong answers as teaching moments. Get others involved in understanding misconceptions and errors.

Neither cold calling nor waiting for volunteers is "right" in an absolute, definitive sense. As the research indicates, the success or failure of participation techniques is a function of how they are used.

Reference: Dallimore, E. J., J.H. Hertenstein, and M.B. Platt. 2004. Faculty-generated strategies for "cold calling" use: A comparative analysis with student recommendations. *Journal of Excellence in College Teaching*. 16(1): 23–62. ♥

## Putting the Participation Puzzle Together

Participation continues to be the most common method faculty use to get students involved and active in their learning. As previous research has documented, faculty use participation strategies with limited success. On average only 25 percent of students in a course participate, and half of the group who make contributions in class do so to the extent that they dominate the discussion.

A host of studies across the past 30 years have isolated factors and conditions that affect participation: things like the size of the class (obviously, the bigger the class the less opportunity for individual participation); faculty authority (that makes students fear faculty criticism); age (older students tend to participate more); gender (some early work describing a “chilly” climate for women in classrooms); student preparedness; and student confidence.

Up to this point, no research has attempted to put these various pieces together, to make individual findings an integrated and coherent whole. Fortunately, the study referenced below begins this needed work. It begins with this premise: “the college classroom, like any other workplace, is a social organization where power is asserted, tasks are assigned and negotiated, and work is accomplished through the interplay of formal and informal social structures. The present study . . . relates a variety of otherwise unconnected variables and concepts to the broader theoretical framework of social organizations.” (p. 579). Using survey data collected from 1,550 undergraduate and graduate students at a medium-sized, urban university, researchers used a path model to assess direct and indirect influences on class participation.

Based on previous research, they used the path model to test 10 hypotheses about participation. Each hypothesis and a brief summary of the findings from this research are listed below. This is a large, complex analysis—more findings and information about them are contained in

the article.

- Students’ perception of large class size and lack of opportunity negatively affect self-reported participation both directly and indirectly by increasing fear of peer disapproval and of professor’s criticisms. Contrary to other findings, the path coefficients reported in this study fail to support the hypothesis. Not only was the coefficient insignificant, it pointed in the wrong direction.
- Students’ perception of faculty authority negatively affects self-reported participation both directly and indirectly by increasing fear of peer disapproval and of professors’ criticisms and by decreasing level of confidence. Results showed that perceptions of the professor as an authority of knowledge had “a moderate negative direct effect.” (p. 586). Said another way, “the more students perceive the professor as the authority of knowledge, the less likely it is that they will participate in class.” (p. 586)
- Students’ self-reported rates of interaction with faculty positively affected reported participation both directly and indirectly by decreasing fear of peer disapproval and of professor’s criticisms and by increasing level of confidence. **Faculty-student interaction has the largest direct, indirect, and total effects on self-reported participation.** “We suggest . . . that faculty members not only indirectly shape classroom dynamics . . . but also directly influence students’ behaviors in class through the relationship they develop with their students during out-of-class activities.” (p. 591)
- Students’ self-reported fear of peer disapproval negatively affects reported participation both directly and indirectly by decreasing level of confidence. Fear of peer disapproval was the third largest factor affecting participation. And this fear of peer response also had the largest negative effect on student confidence.
- Students’ self-reported fear of profes-

sors’ criticisms negatively affects reported participation directly and indirectly by decreasing level of confidence. This fear of did not exert important effects on students’ reports of their participation.

- Student’s self-reported rates of para-participation (including nonverbal feedback and informal discussions with the instructor before or after class) have a positive, direct effect on reported class participation. This hypothesis was confirmed: “Para-participation increases the likelihood of more conventional participation in the classroom.” (p. 588)
- Students’ age positively affects self-reported class participation, both directly and indirectly via confidence and diminished fear of peer disapproval and of professor’s criticisms. These results confirmed earlier findings: “As age increases, so does students’ self-reported participation.” (p. 588). To illustrate, traditional age students, those 18 to 24 were 2.5 times more likely to report that they never or seldom participated in class. Non traditional students were three times more likely to report that they always participated.
- Male students will report greater levels of class participation, will report higher levels of confidence, and are less likely to develop feelings of fear of peer disapproval and professor’s criticism than female students are. “Our results indicate that gender has little or no effect on self-reported participation rates.” (p. 590)
- Students’ reported lack of preparation has negative, indirect effects on participation by increasing the fear of peer disapproval and of professors’ criticisms and by decreasing confidence. The results partially supported this hypothesis. The direct effect is weak and unexpectedly in the negative direction, meaning being prepared decreases participation. But the indirect effects were

# Differences Between Student and Faculty Perceptions of Learning Strategies

By Douglas J. Lynch, Wilkes University, PA  
dlynch@wilkes.edu

One of the continual challenges of college teaching involves helping students adapt to academic demands that differ from those of high school. My interest in this problem led to a research project that compared the learning and study strategies used by students in a college course with the learning and study strategies their professors believe to be most important for success in the course.

Freshman and upper-level students responded to the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) after fall midterms. The MSLQ is a self-report instrument that has been used extensively in previous research investigating college student motivation and learning strategies. Students respond on a seven-point scale, with the extremes marked by “not at all true of me” or “very true of me.” For example, one item reads, “When I become confused about something for this class, I go back and try to figure it out.” Students answer the questions about the course in which the survey is administered. The survey yields scores indicating the extent to which students used these well-known learning strategies: *rehearsal*, *elaboration*, *organization*, *peer learning*, *critical thinking*, and *seeking help*. I then asked faculty who taught these courses to rate the extent to which these learning strategies were required for students to do well in their courses.

The results clearly indicated considerable discrepancies between the learning strategies faculty believe to be important in their courses and the strategies that students report using in the course. Both first-year and upper-level student scores showed that the students believed rehearsal to be more important than faculty believed it to be. Faculty rated elaboration, organization, critical thinking, peer learning, and seeking help as more important for success in their courses than the

students did. The discrepancy was greatest for the cognitive strategies associated with deeper processing: elaboration, organization, and critical thinking. Although both first-year students and their upper-division counterparts show a pattern of reliance on the same strategies, the beginning students underestimated the need for critical thinking and seeking help even more than did their experienced peers.

Based on these discrepancies between faculty and student beliefs, I suggest that faculty address study strategies explicitly using the terms *rehearsal*, *organization*, *elaboration*, and *critical thinking* to describe them. Students should be taught mnemonic techniques (such as *loci* or *acronyms*) to enhance rehearsal. Fostering organization requires emphasizing the process of relating ideas into categories or patterns that illustrate relationships. Charts, matrices, models, and outlines are effective ways to draw attention to patterns. They may also graphically present the organization of the ideas. (The software program *Inspiration* provides many templates for such organization.) To emphasize elaboration, faculty may explicitly ask students for connections between what they are learning today and what they have learned before: How does what we have done today connect with what we talked about a few weeks ago? What new or different ideas have been added since then? Faculty may encourage critical thinking by defining terms (such as *inference*, *deduction*, and *induction*) and providing students with examples of such thinking applied to their courses. Students will learn to work productively with peers if faculty require cooperative learning projects in which each person is accountable and depends upon the work of the others.

I also recommend that faculty regularly explain how these approaches to learning could be applied to course content, assignments, and exam preparation. After exams and assignments have been returned to students, the professor may address com-

mon weaknesses and suggest ways to improve study strategies. College requires more sophisticated learning skills than are required in high school. My research shows that students opt for the strategies that have served them well in the past, but those aren't the skills their college teachers equate with success. The sooner students come to understand the difference, the better!

*Editor's Note: The research summarized in this article will be published in an upcoming issue of the College Student Journal.*

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## RECYCLING FROM PAGE 1

(e.g., topic, outline, themes identified after researching sources) to an online bulletin board. This process can also help the students to learn from each other's work.

- After you receive paper submissions,
  - Look for formatting that is different from what you required.
  - Be suspicious of any paper that is submitted without a bibliography. Much of the online material lacks references.
  - Look for unique phrases in a paper. Type the entire phrase, surrounded by quotation marks, into an online search engine. It may lead you to the source of the plagiarism.

## Conclusion

The temptations of the online term paper mills are great, enticing even the best students with the lure of an easy way to complete a difficult assignment. While online-enabled plagiarism is very widespread, a concerned instructor can take steps to prevent it and check for it after papers have been submitted. The process may prevent students from making decisions that can potentially derail promising academic careers.

## Principles That Make Improvement a Positive Process

*Editor's note: These principles don't propose breathtakingly new insights, but they offer a context for improvement that should make efforts to teach better more successful.*

- **Improvement is not a dirty word**—All teachers can improve; most should. Don't base efforts on premises of remediation and deficiency. Positive premises work just as well. You can improve your teaching just as effectively doing more of what works well as you can by seeking to eliminate weaknesses.
- **Focus efforts to improve on encouraging more and better learning for students**—Asking if a teacher wants to improve often engenders a defensive response (more evidence of premises of remediation and a motivation to improve driven by the need to fix problems). Asking if a teacher cares how much and how well students learn engenders positive responses, even from curmudgeons. Take what is known about learning (much is) and work to figure out the instructional implications of that theory and research. Ask yourself this question: If a teacher aspired to teach in ways that promoted learning, what would that teacher do about instructional nuts and bolts such as assignments, classroom policies, and presentational approaches?
- **Don't trivialize what's involved in the process**—Stop thinking quick fixes, techniques, and training. The “just-do-it” approach toward instructional change doesn't cut it. Discovering a good technique and attaching it to whatever's happening in class tomorrow trivializes the complex interplay of variables that contribute to success in the classroom. Effective, sustainable change rests on careful planning and a systematic, thoughtful approach to change.
- **Recognize the role of learning in the improvement process**—Most faculty aren't trained to teach, and norms expecting ongoing growth and development are not strong. As a result, most of what we know about teaching we have learned by doing—not by study, analysis, and careful reflection. Most faculty are surprised when they discover how much can be learned by reading, by encountering research and theory, and by thoughtful analysis. Part of what makes this learning motivating and satisfying is that class time tomorrow (or sometime soon) offers an opportunity to apply that new knowledge. Most of us love to learn, and seeing teaching and learning as new material to master can make teaching a source of intellectual intrigue.
- **Personhood is expressed through teaching**—We do teach content and we do teach students, but just as surely we teach who we are. Conduct in and out of the classroom conveys important messages about values, beliefs, and attitudes. Because students respond to us as people, because teaching reveals something about us as human beings, it leaves us vulnerable, open, exposed, and thereby able to be hurt. It's an occupational hazard for which we don't get extra pay or protection. But it also affords opportunity—the chance to be valued and confirmed as a person, to be honored and respected. This means that better teaching isn't always about learning the content better. It isn't always about the acquisition of new techniques. Sometimes it's about being a better person.
- **Improvement begins and ends with the faculty member**—You play the central role in the improvement process. Others may try to motivate. They may threaten (no merit raise if you don't improve). They may cajole (your students deserve it). They may try to persuade (your students will learn more if you do it this way). But they cannot implement one change in your classroom . . . you alone can do that. In the same way that you can't learn anything for your students, nobody can improve your teaching for you. It's something done by you, for you (and for your students).
- **Formative feedback guarantees the integrity of the improvement process**—Teachers need diagnostic, descriptive details that help them understand the impact of their policies, practices, and behaviors on student learning. The systems used by most institutions to evaluate instruction fail to provide this kind of feedback. This failure is a good news/bad news scenario. The bad news is that most institutions could (and should) be doing better. This is an area in which much useful research has been conducted. The good news is that you can step in and make the process work for you. You can ask students about the impact of a particular assignment, activity, practice, exam, or reading on their learning. You can ask questions about the impact of any aspect of instruction on learning. You should be asking about many of these aspects if you want to make wise and well-informed decisions about improvement.
- **Set realistic expectations for success**—Too often we expect perfection. In order to be “good,” a classroom activity has to thoroughly engage and involve every single student. It has to work every time we use it, regardless of class level and content. Anything less than complete success means the activity is flawed or we have failed. Realistically, however, anything we do or try in the class is going to have mixed results. Although aspirations to perfection are lofty, they aren't very realistic, at least for most of us.
- **See teaching excellence as a career-long quest**—Don't expect to finally get it right or to permanently achieve an exemplary level of teaching excellence. Once you think you've arrived, the journey is over. It's the quest for teaching excellence that motivates, inspires, and satisfies. Find pleasure in your travels. Once you reach one destination, leave shortly for yet another interesting place. 

## Exams and *American Idol*

By Todd M. Hamilton, Georgetown College,  
Georgetown, KY  
Todd\_Hamilton@georgetowncollege.edu

I don't know why I didn't see it before. After 10 years of teaching, I finally realize why students get so nervous about exams. It's because taking an exam is a performance.

It's just like the now-notorious *American Idol* show, when they are doing the first round of auditions. You can have great natural ability and sound terrific, but when the spotlight shines down as you stand in front of the judges and the TV cameras, can you make it happen? That determines who's invited to continue. It doesn't matter how you sound in the shower. It doesn't matter how well you do when performing for family or friends. It's how you sound when it's showtime.

The same can be said about an exam. Students may be able to do any calculation or answer any question in your office, in the hallway, in their dorm rooms, or at the kitchen table. But how do they perform in class with the test paper in front of them? That's what determines their grades on the test and often in the course.

So how can we, as professors, help students do well when it's time to perform? I have developed several strategies. The first is easy: practice, practice, practice. I work an example on the board. Then I give students a similar problem that they work individually. After they've finished, we go over the answer. Next, I have them solve problems in small groups, discussing various approaches and the solution. I offer help only when needed. Outside of class, they use an online homework program that allows multiple attempts for each problem. By the time they see a problem on an exam, they have had several opportunities to successfully solve that type of problem.

Second, I help them learn to perform by lowering the stakes. Unlike *American Idol*, I don't let exams be a make-or-break event in the course. Exams count for 30

percent of the final grade (the final exam counts as an additional 20 percent). The students have many other opportunities to demonstrate that they have learned the material, such as the online homework, group quizzes, and the laboratory portion of the course. When we go over the exam after it has been graded, I give the students the opportunity to correct 5 or 10 items for one point each.

In my junior-level physical chemistry course, I allow students to bring to exams a note card with relevant equations and constants. Designing the card before the exam is a learning experience in and of itself. I also allow them to drop one regular exam so that a single bad performance doesn't ruin the whole semester. Again, my approach assumes that there is learning potential in the performance events themselves. I want my students to know chemistry, *and* I want them to learn how to perform well in pressure situations.

I have given my introductory chemistry students the opportunity to take exams in pairs. Students collaborate on discussions and problem sets in the classroom, on experiments in the laboratory, and will also do so as scientists in their respective careers. Why not collaborate on exams? When I used this strategy, students shared the overall grade, but I see many interesting possibilities for scoring such an exam. One could design the exam such that each student would take responsibility for a certain number of questions. Professors could hand out questions 1 through 5 only to student A and questions 6 through 10 only to student B. After the students have had time to complete those questions, the professor could collect them and then allow both students time to collaborate on questions 11 through 20. Their grades could be a combination of their individual and collaborative efforts. This approach makes pairing the students important. Should they be allowed to choose their partners? How would this approach work if an instructor paired a weaker and a stronger student?

My bottom line: Give students several opportunities to shine, on exams and other assignments, and make sure they are prepared for test day so that they can overcome any test anxiety. That way, they won't end up in the "bottom three" or, worse yet, be eliminated. A teacher should want the performance to justify moving all students to the next round! 🍀

### PUZZLE

FROM PAGE 3

positive. Lack of preparation did influence participation by effecting confidence and fears. (p.590)

- Students' confidence positively affects self-reported participation rate. This hypothesis was confirmed.

This research article is long and the methodology sophisticated, but the generation of the hypotheses and discussion of results are clear and accessible. In addition to being an impressive example of the scholarship that integrates, the article is exceptionally well referenced. It contains an amazingly more complete list of research and theory on and related to participation.

Reference: Weaver, R. R., and Qi, Jiang (2005). Classroom organization and participation: College students' perceptions. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76 (5), 570-601. 🍀

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## Writing to Reflect and Improve

I grow ever more convinced of the power of writing to improve instructional practice. The process of putting ideas, feelings, and reactions into words slows the mind and permanently captures the thought. Even though these thoughts may be imprecise, even inaccurate, writing puts them in a place where they can be looked at, analyzed more completely, and refined further.

The daily grind of teaching affords few opportunities for reflection: there's preparation for class tomorrow; there are papers stacked and waiting to be graded; there's the student standing patiently outside the office door. But writing, specifically journal writing, can be accomplished quickly; with a computer always at the ready on that cluttered desk (well, mine's cluttered), even five minutes allows enough time to record a range of thoughts that can be analyzed later.

Josh Boyd and Steve Boyd, in a recent article that advocates the use of teaching journals, point out how college faculty commonly learn to teach by osmosis and self-education. They see journals as a way for busy faculty to complement that process. Also of value in their piece is the identification of three basic types of teaching journals.

**Descriptive journals**—Some have called this kind of journal a “textbook of emergent practice.” (p. 111) In its most straightforward form, it's simply a record of material covered in class. Boyd and Boyd recommend making the record more useful by including descriptions of student reactions. Did they get involved in the exercise? Did they understand the illustration? In their experience, these authors report having learned the most from their records of actual student comments—when the students answered questions and when they took a different perspective, as well as when they provided direct feedback about a classroom event.

**Comparative journals**—“The com-

parative dimension of journaling goes beyond simply writing down what happens in class to examining the class from different perspectives.” (p. 111) A bit later they elaborate and offer an example: “Journaling provides an opportunity to recall which areas student had difficulty understanding, and consequently, which areas we need to emphasize or explain more in the future. Comparing our instruction with the misunderstandings that might have resulted enables us to consider student perspectives; bad test questions (and why they were confusing or misleading), for instance, also find a place in the journal so that future exams will be better.” It isn't always a record of what didn't work. Journals work just as well to track where the teaching and learning connected and to generate suppositions about what precipitated that joining.

**Critical journals**—Critical here does not just mean critique as in negative self-appraisal. Critical also means being reflective, considering broader implications and deeper meanings (p. 112). These journals take both the teacher and the teaching to task in positive, constructive ways. Often the best time for critique (in both senses) is not at the point of writing but later, when some time has elapsed and there is space (maybe during the summer) for reflection.

I first started journaling when teaching a new course. I felt unprepared and needed an efficient way of recording what else I needed to find and develop for the course. My quick notes helped greatly the next time I taught the course, but to my surprise it was other comments, reactions, and feelings that caused me to reflect and approach my teaching more thoughtfully. In the beginning I journaled while thinking about the audience . . . what if somebody else read this stuff? One of my colleagues in the English department told me to see myself as the audience—this was writing for me. She recommended throw-

ing journal writing away once read as a way to convince myself that there was no other intended audience.

If you haven't ever tried journaling about teaching, as the authors of the article cited below have, I recommend the practice. You can approach the task very open-endedly. Back in your office after class, write for five minutes about what happened. Let yourself write whatever comes to you. Don't reread, edit, or revise. After the class is over, read the journal from start to finish. I think you'll be surprised how much you learn.

Reference: Boyd, J., and S. Boyd. 2005. Reflect and improve: Instructional development through a teaching journal. *College Teaching* 53(3): 110–114. ♥

### ENGAGEMENT

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Regression analyses revealed that the student engagement factor explained 26 percent of the variance in homework assignment grades, 28 percent of the variance in midterm exam grades and 30 percent of the variance in final exam grades.

These researchers only measured student engagement at one point in a course. They point out that it may vary across a course and as a consequence of certain course-related experiences like failing an exam or doing extremely well on one. This instrument has many potential applications in future research but for faculty it has equally important potential as formative feedback tool with results useful to the instructor as well as the individual student.

Reference: Handelsman, M. M., Briggs, W. L., Sullivan, N., and Towler, A. (2005). A measure of college student course engagement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 98 (3), 184–191. ♥

## Looking Both Ways

I'm on sabbatical this year, and although I'm not on campus, the faculty Listserv keeps me connected and up-to-date on happenings and issues.

This fall, all our beginning students shared a common reading, and as part of this new program, the author was brought to campus. Many faculty required student attendance at his presentation . . . so many, in fact, that the audience had to be convened in our gym and not the regular auditorium. It was hot, acoustics were poor, and the address lasted an hour and a half. Student behavior was not exemplary. Their attention waned, and a significant number talked openly with those around them. They bolted at the first possible moment.

The next day, irate, embarrassed, disappointed, and otherwise distraught faculty reported and discussed this poor behavior on the Listserv. Notes went back and forth about what to do. The general consensus seemed to be that we can no longer expect students to know how to behave at schol-

arly presentations and that we must tell them how to comport themselves. One unanswered note raised the question of required attendance, wondering whether the fact that students were there because they had to be might have influenced their behavior.

Over the years, I have given many presentations, workshops, and programs on teaching and learning to faculty. I've learned a few things along the way. For example, when invited to come to campus to do one of these presentations, I ask early on, "Will faculty be required to attend this event, or is attendance at their discretion?" I ask this question because I've learned that required attendance decidedly influences faculty behavior during the session. Regularly, people in those audiences are rude. They don't listen but do other work. Sometimes they talk to those around them and look for opportunities to leave early. I still do some presentations for which attendance is required, but I keep the

number low. If I had to do a steady diet of them, I would stop doing workshops for faculty.

And the exchange on my campus Listserv reminded me of something else, quite different but not unrelated. Routinely now on course syllabi, I see strongly worded messages about how cell phones must be shut off and stowed during class. I hear faculty discussing what they do if one happens to ring. And it is true; those beeping electronic ditties disrupt the learning environment. But you know what? I can't remember how long it's been since I've given a presentation to faculty during which somebody's cell phone didn't go off.

I'm not trying to make some large, existential point here. I just don't see faculty and students as being all that different, and I wonder if we might not learn something about our students by looking at ourselves.

## Student Engagement in Courses

At this point, it's a well-established fact that student engagement in college makes a big difference in important things like persistence and performance. The measures most often used to ascertain the level of engagement are global ones. They measure how well a student is connected to the college experience overall. A group of researchers at the University of Colorado at Denver thought it might be useful to assess engagement at the course level as well. At this micro level instructors have options for increasing student engagement.

The article referenced below describes the development of a valid and reliable measure of student engagement at the course level. Using an inductive approach and feedback from faculty and students, these researchers identified 27 behaviors and attitudes that might be indicative of course engagement. They assembled these into a survey (items from the survey are

included in the article) and asked 266 undergraduates in three disciplines to rate the course in which the survey was administered.

A factor analysis of the 27 survey items supported the presence of four factors as being the major determinants of students' engagement in a course. The first and most important factor researchers labeled the skills engagement factor. It represented those student behaviors commonly assumed to be indicative of involvement—things like taking notes in class, regularly reviewing notes, doing homework problems, keeping up on the readings, regularly attending class, and listening during class.

The second factor they called emotional engagement. It demonstrated involvement by the emotional connections students reported making with the course—things like apply the course material to their lives, thinking about course material

between class sessions, working to make course content relevant and really wanting to learn the material.

A third factor participation/interaction engagement involved more visible behaviors like asking questions when not understanding the content, going to the professor's office hours, participating in small group discussions, and helping other students.

The final factor researchers called performance engagement. It involved behaviors and attitudes associated with performance—like confidence about learning and doing well in a course, getting good grades, and doing well on exams.

In a second study, researchers looked at the relationship between students' engagement in the course and their grades on weekly homework assignments, midterm examination grades, and final exam grades.