

[UMT Staff:7701] #75: *The Teaching & Learning Communique*

1 message

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A Memo to My Students as the New Semester Begins



To: My Students

From: Your Teacher

Re: A Better Learning Experience

This is just a brief note to let you know how committed I am to making this a good course. But I can't do my best teaching without your help. So, I thought I'd share a list of things you can do that will make this a better experience for all of us.

Be there. When you're in class or online doing course-related work, I need you to be there completely. Yes, this means being physically present, but I'm hoping for more than just your body in class. I teach better when you are mentally present—listening, taking notes, mulling things over in your head, asking questions, occasionally nodding (when you understand), and sometimes looking surprised, confused, or amused (as the situation warrants). And yes, you may even look bored, if that's how you're feeling. I need that feedback, too. What I don't need—and find very discouraging—is having you in class but not really there. Don't kid yourself: I know when students are doing things with their devices or finishing homework for another class, looking up every now and then and pretending to listen. Trust me, feigning attention doesn't look

anything like attentive listening. You'll make the course easier for me to teach and you to learn if you are present and engaged in what's happening in class.

Participate! Yes, I do give points for participation, even though I know that encourages some students to contribute solely to earn them. There's no need to speak every day. Less is sometimes more. Speak when you've got something to say! Ask a thoughtful question, share a relevant experience, respond to another student's comment, or voice a different perspective—contributions like these make the class interesting for me and everyone else. And thanks in advance to those of you who voluntarily participate.

I know many students find it difficult to contribute in class. I try to make it easier by broadly defining participation. If you've got a question about the reading, something I said in class, or an observation that a classmate offered, and you couldn't quite find the courage to raise your hand, send your question or contribution to me electronically. You also can participate by posting on the course website. Maybe it will be a list of the three most important things you learned in class on a given day, a short paragraph that summarizes the discussion that ended class, or a set of study questions for an upcoming exam.

And everyone can participate in this course by listening and paying attention—especially when another student is speaking. Good listeners respond nonverbally with eye contact and facial expressions. They don't look close to comatose.

A class that's participating energizes my teaching. Your comments, questions, and responses feed me. Without your participation, I feel like I'm at a dinner table where all I do is serve the food and never get to eat it. I'd like to be sharing the meal with you instead.

Help me get to know you. Let's start with names. I am committed to learning yours and do hope you'll learn mine. Almost everybody struggles with names, including me. If I speak to you without using your name, call me on it. If I've forgotten, give me something that will help me remember. Let's greet each other by name when we run into each other on campus. Stop by my office. I keep a basket of granola bars for hungry students. I know they're not as good as candy, but they're healthier. See, we've found some common ground already.

I'd like to get to know you beyond just your name. What's your major? Why did you decide on it? What courses are you taking? Tell me something you just learned in one of your other classes. Why are you in this course? I know; it's required. I think it's required for a compelling set of reasons, but I'm probably not all that objective. What would like to learn in this course? What are you finding easy and difficult about this content?

I teach better when I know the students I see in class or chat with online as real people—students with names, faces, and interesting lives. I do my best teaching when I have students who care about learning (and grades); who have dreams, goals, and ambitions; and who want to get out there and fix what's broken. I do my best teaching when I have students who are serious about getting ready for life—or getting ready to make a better life. I want you to experience my best teaching, and I hope you'll help me make that happen this semester.

Credits

FACULTY FOCUS

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