

Six Things That Make College Teachers Successful

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By Mary Clement EdD.

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1. Study the knowledge base of teaching and learning.

You have chosen to teach in higher education because you are a subject-matter specialist with a tremendous knowledge of your discipline. As you enter or continue your career, there is another field of knowledge you need to know: teaching and learning. What we know about teaching and learning continues to grow dramatically. It includes developing effective instructional strategies, reaching today's students, and teaching with technology. Where is this knowledge base? Books, articles in pedagogical periodicals, newsletters, conferences, and online resources provide ample help. Take advantage of your institution's center for teaching and learning or other professional development resources.

2. Accept all who enter the classroom door.

Much has been written about underprepared students who enter college. Since more students attend college now than ever before, it is only rational that some are not as prepared as we might expect. Institutions are dealing with this issue, but instructors must do some rethinking about how they teach, in order to meet the needs of all learners in their classrooms. Ungraded pretests and interest inventories can be used to see what your students already know about the content you will be teaching next. Students in all classes need help learning how to learn the material. You may not have imagined that you would be teaching how to learn vocabulary

in your college courses, but that may be just what your students need. Above all, students should not be berated if they don't know things that weren't taught in high school. Accept students where they are and help them to go forward. They need a college education!

3. Plan for instructional management.

For decades, college instructors never thought of classroom management as something they had to plan, but times have changed and today's college students need to know what's happening. Posting a visual outline of what will be done during the class helps students follow the lesson and stay on task. Various aspects of teaching, such as distributing papers, taking attendance, and making time for students to ask questions, need to be part of course planning. Put policies in the syllabus about attendance, disturbances, cell phones, etc., and then review those policies with students. You set the tone of the class, and management procedures are needed.

4. Teach with a variety of strategies.

Study the literature and learn about approaches such as learner-centered teaching, guided inquiry, active learning, lecture, group work, and online discussion. Use what works best given your content and your students' learning needs. The best advice is to be visual, followed by keeping students actively thinking, writing, comparing, and applying new knowledge. Students learn more easily when they've been given the rationale for what they are learning, and when they understand why the teacher has chosen certain instructional methods and learning activities.

5. Use assessment to inform students of their achievement.

Today's students are used to checking their grades online so they know where they stand at any given time in the semester. Grading policies need to be clear and grading scales easy to use. Share your grading policy in writing on the syllabus and then show exactly how it works after the first big exam, paper, or assignment. Remind students that assessment is more than the assigning of a grade. Assessment helps them to understand their achievement and helps teachers meet their needs.

6. Keep the passion.

It is very easy to become disheartened by student complaints, lack of administrative support, budget cuts, and job insecurity. However, what is it that drew you to your discipline originally? For most of us, it was a true passion for the subject, a desire to learn all about it, and a further desire to then share that knowledge. In higher education, we have opportunities to learn, research, teach, and shape the future of our disciplines and influence the larger world through our disciplines. Successful college teachers recognize that many of today's college students have learning needs. Taking actions like these helps them to meet those challenges successfully.

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