

**Integrating Learner-centered Instruction into First-Year Experience Courses:  
A Practical Approach  
2.15.10**

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**Contrasts Between Teacher-centered and Learner-centered Approaches on Each of the Five Dimension of Learner-Centered Teaching**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Definition of this dimension</b>	<b>An essential component</b>	<b>Teacher-centered approach</b>	<b>Learner-centered approach</b>
1) The Function of Content	Content includes building a knowledge base, how the instructor and the students use the content.	Level to which students engage in content.	Instructor allows students to memorize content.	Instructor encourages students to transform and reflect on most of the content to make their own meaning out of it.
2) The Role of the Instructor	An essential role of the instructor is to assist students to learn.	Instructor uses teaching and learning methods appropriate for student learning goals.	Instructor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not have specified learning goals and/or</li> <li>• Uses teaching and learning methods that conflict with learning goals.</li> </ul>	Instructor intentionally uses various teaching and learning methods that are appropriate for student learning goals.
3) The Responsibility for Learning	Students should assume greater responsibility for their own learning over time.	Responsibility for learning should rest with the students.	Instructor assumes <i>all</i> responsibility for student learning (provides content to memorize, does not require students to create their own meaning of content, tells students exactly what will be on examinations).	Instructor provides increasing opportunities for students to assume responsibility for their own learning, leading to achievement of stated learning objectives.
4) The Purposes and Processes of Assessment	There are additional purposes and processes of assessment beyond assigning grades.	Formative assessment (giving feedback to foster improvement).	Instructor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses only summative assessment (to make decisions to assign grades)</li> <li>• Provides students with no constructive feedback.</li> </ul>	Consistently throughout the learning process, instructor integrates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formative assessment</li> <li>• Constructive feedback.</li> </ul>
5) The Balance of Power	The balance of power shifts so that the instructor shares some decisions about the course with the students.	Flexibility of course policies, assessment methods, learning methods, and deadlines.	Instructor mandates all policies and deadlines, <i>or</i> Instructor does not adhere to policies.	Instructor is flexible on most <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course policies</li> <li>• Assessment methods</li> <li>• Learning methods</li> <li>• Deadlines</li> </ul> <i>And</i> Instructor always adheres to what instructor has agreed to with the students.

Source: Blumberg, P. (2009). *Developing Learner-centered Teaching: A Practical Guide for Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

## Why Should Instructors Use Learner-Centered Approaches?

1. **The knowledge base.** The conclusive result of decades of research on building a knowledge base is that what a person already knows determines what new information she attends to, how she organizes and represents new information, how she filters new experiences, and even what she determines to be important or relevant. *Thus, learner-centered instructors will help their students assimilate new information in relation to what they have previously learned.*
2. **Strategic processing and executive control.** The ability to reflect on and regulate one's thoughts and behaviors is an essential aspect of learning. Successful students are actively involved in their own learning, monitor their thinking, think about their learning, and assume responsibility for their own learning. *Thus, learner-centered instructors use activities that ask students to reflect on and monitor their learning. Learner-centered instructors help students learn how to take responsibility for their own learning.*
3. **Motivation and affect.** The benefits of learner-centered education include increased motivation for learning and greater satisfaction with school; both outcomes lead to greater achievement. Research shows that personal involvement, intrinsic motivation, personal commitment, confidence in one's abilities to succeed, and a perception of control over learning lead to more learning and achievement in school. *Thus, learner-centered instructors help their students become intrinsically motivated to learn instead of being driven by grades; they help their students perceive that they have control over their learning.*
4. **Development and individual differences.** Individuals progress through various common stages of development, influenced by both inherited and environmental factors. Depending on the context or task, changes in how people think, believe, or behave are dependent on a combination of one's inherited abilities, stages of development, individual differences, capabilities, experiences, and environmental conditions. *Thus, learner-centered instructors use different teaching and learning activities and approaches to accommodate individual differences and capabilities.*
5. **Situation or context.** Theories of learning that highlight the roles of active engagement and social interaction in the students' own construction of knowledge strongly support this learner-centered paradigm. Learning is a social process. Many environmental factors, including how the instructor teaches and how actively engaged the student is in the learning process, positively or negatively influence how much and what students learn. In comparison studies between students in lecture and active-learning courses, there are significantly more learning gains in the active learning courses. *Thus, learner-centered instructors routinely use activities where the students interact with each other, such as in small groups, while actively engaging with the content to be learned.*

Adapted from Blumberg, P. (2009). Practical Tools to Help Faculty Use Learner-Centered Approaches. In L. Nilson & J. Miller (Eds.). *To Improve the Academy: Vol. 27. Resources for Faculty, Instructional, and Organizational Development* (pp. 111-134). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

## **Metropolitan State College of Denver First Year Success Program Outcomes**

Students will report a successful transition to Metro State...

- by learning how to use campus resources
- by learning how to use advisors as a resource

Students will achieve academic success...

- as defined by compliance with academic policies and course completion
- as defined by the application of academic success skills (note-taking, organization of course materials, test-taking, time management, etc.)

Students will become engaged with the campus community...

- by making connections with faculty
- by making connections with staff
- by interacting with peers in a learning community environment

Students will successfully navigate the college experience with the support of their learning community.

Students will explore a wide range of academic majors and career options.

Students will achieve the desired learning objectives articulated for their cohort courses.

Students will choose to stay at Metro State for at least their second year of college.

## Learner-centeredness in First-Year Instruction

<b>Learner-centered Dimension</b>	<b>First-Year Instruction Practice</b> Sources: Erickson et al., <i>Teaching First-Year College Students</i> and Strommer, "Teaching First Year College Students: Ten Tips for Success."
1) The function of content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Too often we require memorization and little more. This practice undermines student motivation, fails to develop thinking skills, and reinforces beliefs that knowledge is factual, known to authorities, and acquired through memorization." (Erickson, 31)</li> <li>• "The critical issue for learning in any course is not what or how much content is covered but rather what students will achieve—what they will come to understand, what they will be able to do, and the behaviors they will perform, such as recalling ideas, recognizing examples, applying general principles to specific examples. These constitute the outcomes of the course." (Strommer, 42)</li> </ul>
2) The role of the instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "We want to encourage some reflection on just how our stated expectations for first-year students fit with the actual practice of our instruction. We say students need to invest six hours per week per course, yet they succeed by doing significantly less. We say students need to develop higher order intellectual skills, yet they say we mostly ask them to memorize. We say we want students to develop the skills that will sustain lifelong learning, but many of our courses seem to demand only that they do more, and more frequently, of the things we already know they can do." (Erickson, 12)</li> <li>• Learning depends on more than intellectual ability. Motivation and self-confidence [...] determine academic success as much as, or more than, native intelligence. (Strommer, 49)</li> </ul>
3) The responsibility for learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "While commentary on higher education frequently refers to students' need to become 'life-long' or 'self-directed' learners, how this is supposed to occur is seldom specified. All too rarely do we offer students opportunities to connect what they have learned with their lives or to reflect on how they are learning. Yet in these ways they develop critical thinking skills and expand their notion of learning as something other than memorization." (Strommer, 49)</li> <li>• Paying attention to learning styles in the first-year seminar by administering and discussing the Kolb Learning Style Inventory or the Personal Style Inventory in Gardner and Jewler (1992) can help students better understand themselves as learners and encourage them to expand their approaches to learning." (Strommer, 44)</li> </ul>
4) The purposes and processes of assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Because most of our assessment practices favor some learning styles over others, advocates of institution-wide assessment initiatives stress that we need to offer students a variety of ways to demonstrate their learning... Most faculty, especially those teaching first-year courses, need to combine several assessment types if their evaluation is to be valid, reliable, and fair to diverse students." (Erickson, 163)</li> <li>• "We believe the most robust grading systems create an opportunity for students to submit their best evidence that they have achieved course goals. This belief occasionally creates a dilemma because inviting students to submit their best evidence implies permitting variety in grading opportunities, perhaps giving students a choice about what should count in grading." (Erickson, 184)</li> </ul>
5) The balance of power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (See above)</li> </ul>

<b>Community</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Accessibility of teacher	Available for prescribed number of office hours only	Available for prescribed number of office hours; provides phone and email	Multiple means of access; encourages interaction	Multiple means of access; requires interaction
Learning rationale	No rationale provided for assignments or activities	Explanation of assignments and activities but not tied directly to learning outcomes	Rationale provided for assignments and activities; tied to learning outcomes	Rationale provided for assignments, activities, methods, policies and procedures; tied to learning outcomes
Collaboration	Collaboration prohibited	Collaboration discouraged	Collaboration incorporated; use of groups for work and study	Collaboration required; use of groups for class work, team projects
<b>Power and control</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Teacher's role	Rules are written as directives; numerous penalties	Numerous rules with no explanation/relevance; not tied to LO	Students offered some choice. Relevance of rules offered	Students participate in developing policies; rules tied to LO
Outside resources	No outside resources other than required text	Reference to outside resources provided but not required	Outside resources encouraged; Students responsible for their own learning	Independent investigation required; outside learning required; share outside learning with class
Syllabus focus	Focus is on policies and procedures. No discussion of learning or outcomes	Weighted toward policy and procedures with some reference to content covered	Includes course objectives. Balance between policies and procedures and focus on learning	Syllabus weighted toward student learning outcomes and means of assessment; policies are minimal or left to class negotiation
<b>Evaluation/ Assessment</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Grades	Focus on point deduction; grades used to penalize	Emphasizes the accumulation of points disassociated from learning performance	Grades are tied directly to learning outcomes; students have some options for achieving points	Grades are tied to learning outcomes; option for achieving points; not all work is graded
Feedback mechanisms	Mid-term and Final test grades only. Students not allowed to see or to retain copies of tests	Mid-term and Final test grades with minimal other graded work. Tests not cumulative. Students may see but not retain tests	Grades and other feedback in the form of non-graded assignments, activities, opportunities to conference with teacher	Periodic feedback mechanisms employed for the purpose of monitoring learning
Evaluation	Tests only (not comprehensive)	Tests, quizzes and other summative evaluation	Multiple means of Demonstrating outcomes; some ungraded peer assessment	Multiple means of demonstrating outcomes; self evaluation and peer evaluation

Learning outcomes	No outcomes stated	Goals for course stated but not in the form of learning outcomes	Learning outcomes clearly stated	Learning outcomes stated and are tied to specific assessments
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Metropolitan State College of Denver  
 First-Year Success Sample Syllabi  
 Syllabus Assessment Matrix (SAM) Data  
 January 2010

	SPE 1010 (n=3)				ENG 1010 (n=4)				Other (n=6)				item mean
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
<b>Community</b>													
<b>Accessibility of teacher</b>	33%	33%	33%			100%				83%	17%		2.1
<b>Learning Rationale</b>		100%				100%			17%	83%			1.9
<b>Collaboration</b>	33%			67%				100%	50%		33%	17%	2.9
<b>Learning Community*</b>	67%			33%	100%				83%	17%			1.3
<b>Power &amp; Control</b>													
<b>Teacher Role</b>		67%	33%			100%				100%			2.1
<b>Outside Resources</b>			100%		25%		75%		50%		33%	17%	2.5
<b>Syllabus Focus</b>			100%			25%	75%			67%	33%		2.6
<b>Evaluation/Assessment</b>													
<b>Grades</b>		100%				100%				100%			2.0
<b>Feedback Mechanisms</b>		67%	33%			100%				100%			2.1
<b>Evaluation</b>		67%		33%		25%	50%	25%		83%	17%		2.5
<b>Learning Outcomes</b>		33%	67%			75%	25%			50%	50%		2.5

\*this element was added given the emphasis of the FYS Program on Learning Communities

Note: The first four columns present SAM data from SPE 1010 (Intro to Public Speaking) classes (n=3); the next four columns present SAM data from ENG 1010 (Freshman Composition) classes (n=4); and the final set of four columns present SAM data from all other FYS classes (n=6)