



Enhancing Student Participation in the Classroom

Encouraging all students to participate in the classroom is a desirable and worthwhile goal for any course. Most faculty have observed (or, perhaps, have been) the student who tries to answer every question and has an opinion on everything or the student who remains habitually silent, trying to fade into the background. There is a middle ground, however, and these examples help illustrate the point that full-class participation can be challenging given the differences that exist among students. To achieve this outcome, faculty must create multiple options for students to share and contribute—inviting them to engage in their own unique ways and at their individual comfort levels.

The literature on active learning promotes the idea of a classroom where students and faculty engage in lively dialogue that is intentionally focused on exploring course content. Learning can be deepened by hearing the thoughts, ideas, and feelings of others with an opportunity to agree, disagree, and clarify points of concern. It is through this interaction that an understanding of instructional content can be enhanced. Critical to this process is that all students are afforded varied opportunities to participate.

Fassinger (1995) suggested that faculty and students share responsibility for promoting a participatory climate in the classroom. For faculty members, part of setting the stage for a high level of shared responsibility and participation involves

- resisting the temptation to see the time allotted as an opportunity to simply deliver content through lecture;
- planning intentional class time when students engage in dialogue;
- acknowledging and summarizing student contributions to the process; and
- modeling the use of thoughtful questions (i.e., inviting multiple perspectives) and civil disagreement (i.e., ways of agreeably disagreeing).

For students, their role centers on how they perceive “the classroom as a group” and the “degree to which students support one another” (Fassinger, 1995, p. 29). Faculty can further help students in this process by emphasizing activities that boost student confidence (e.g., small-group discussions and seating arrangements, class preparation assignments, using student facilitators) and encouraging them “to see themselves as part of a community, not merely as isolated individuals learning with the assistance of an instructor” (p. 30).



“The notion of looking on at life has always been hateful to me. What am I if I am not a participant? In order to be, I must participate.”

— Antoine de Saint-Exupery,
French Writer/Poet

Creating a Participatory Classroom Environment

A participatory classroom requires tools and practice. Some strategies may work better than others depending on the class, and instructors will need to experiment to find the best set of tools for the situation. The following teaching suggestions can help faculty make the classroom a more engaging and supportive environment to encourage students to share and contribute to their learning.

Institute time for reflection before processing. Often, the more verbal students tend to dominate classroom discussions. To create a pathway for full-class participation, instructors can impose a 60-second time of reflection for students to make written notes outlining their individual responses to a presented question or scenario. At the end of reflection time, the instructor can initiate a conversation about the students' written responses. Even though this reflection strategy does not guarantee that all students will engage in the verbal conversation, it does help assure that every student has participated in the process of responding to course content.

Incorporate free polling tools. There are a variety of free electronic polling websites (e.g., Poll Everywhere: <http://www.polleverywhere.com>) that provide students with an opportunity to share their perspectives and opinions simply by using their phones to text their responses to presented questions. The anonymous, live results can be projected onto a screen for the entire class to see. Since all students contribute to the results (i.e., full-class participation), there is greater opportunity to encourage more students to engage in a follow-up conversation.

Use multiple grouping formats for classroom discussions. Students who may not share with the entire class are often more willing to engage in dialogue and exchange ideas with a partner or small group. Instructors can take advantage of this by using varied groupings (e.g., pairs, dyads, triads) to increase the opportunities for every student to participate in a content-related conversation.

Ask the class to share what they have heard. After students engage in talking with a partner or a small group, it is helpful to harvest information from these conversations to obtain a wider sample of insights and thoughts. However, when students are asked to "step into the spotlight" and reveal their thoughts to the entire class, this is often met with an awkward silence. To deflect attention away from the individual, instructors can reframe their initiating-discussion question by asking, "Could you share with the class something interesting or thought-provoking that you heard from your partner?"

Provide processing opportunities outside, but connected to, the classroom. A unique way of creating in-class participation is by using out-of-class opportunities to foster conversations about course content. Campus learning management systems (e.g., Blackboard, Moodle) can be employed to engage students in discussion forums. This online venue provides an opportunity for everyone to share his or her thoughts and ideas and can enhance a sense of community in the classroom.



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Include one-minute writing assignments. A tried-and-true strategy for getting everyone involved is a required one-minute writing experience at the end of each session. Students provide a written response to a prompt related to the key learning objective for that class. This exercise not only involves all students but also provides the instructor with feedback as to the type of learning that occurred during that session—and is a quick and easy way to take attendance!

Use the “cold call” sparingly and with caution. There can be times when silence fills the classroom, and students do not volunteer to share their thoughts or respond to questions or when one or two students take over discussions. In these situations, it may be useful to make a cold call—asking a specific student to respond, typically not someone with his or hand raised to answer. It is important to make the cold call an invitation to participate and not a “gotcha” moment for the individual student. Although this type of prompt may be necessary from time to time, especially for those reticent students who need an explicit invitation to enter the conversation, it should be used sparingly in favor of other approaches described above that promote sharing and dialogue in smaller less threatening groupings.

Make a commitment to inviting every student to participate!

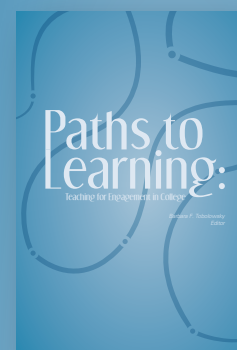
REFERENCES

Fassinger, P. A. (1995). Professors' and students' perceptions of why students participate in class. *Teaching Sociology*, 24, 25-33.

Paths to Learning:

Teaching for Engagement in College

Barbara F. Tobolowsky
Editor



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Facilitated by Tracy L. Skipper, Assistant Director for Publications, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina

RESOURCES ON ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING



A Faculty and Staff Guide to Creating Learning Outcomes

Jimmie Gahagan, John Dingfelder,
and Katharine Pei

*Produced in association with the
Office of Student Engagement,
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(2010). 30 pg. **\$3.00**



The First-Year Seminar: Designing, Implementing, and Assessing Courses to Support Student Learning and Success

Volume V: Assessing the First-Year
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Daniel B. Friedman

ISBN 978-1-889271-81-3.
(2012). 112 pages. **\$25**

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Publications

The spring 2015 issue of the *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition* is now available online. Highlights from each article are included below. Click on the article title to read the full abstract.

Do Community Colleges Promote Postsecondary and Labor Market Success for First-Generation Students by Frimpoaa Ampaw, Margaret Partlo, Tammy Hullender, and Nick Wagner.

First-generation college students who begin in community colleges and transfer successfully have similar labor market outcomes upon graduation as those who begin at four-year institutions.

Reading, Learning, and Growing: An Examination of the Benefits of Common Book Programs for First-Year Students' Development by Krista M. Soria

Results of this multi-institutional study suggest that participation in a common reading program is significantly and positively associated with self-reported gains in academic skills and multicultural competence among first-year students.

The Influence of Perceived Parental Expectations and Pressures on Women's Academic Achievement During the First Year of College by Allyson N. Furry and Susan R. Sy

Women from different ethnic groups perceive parental expectations differently, and perceived parental pressure was negatively associated with academic performance among Latinas and Asian American women.

A Passion for Service? Motivations for Volunteerism Among First-Year College Students

by John T. Stroup, Kyle Dodson, Kaitlyn Elias, and Andrea Gewirtzman

Study explores impact of gender, past volunteer experience, and reason for volunteering on student community service participation in the first college year.

Competent Communication in the First College Year: An Exploratory Study

by Sherwyn Morreale, Constance Staley, and Tajshen Campbell

Qualitative study provides insight into to students' preferred communication methods and how they define appropriate and effective communication.

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National Resource Center Exhibits and Presentations

Like many of you, the staff of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is actively involved in the conference circuit. We are pleased to share the following upcoming opportunities to hear about the results of research studies conducted by the Center, learn about best practices, and meet National Resource Center staff members.

Creating Common Intellectual Experiences: Connecting Students to Campus and Learning.

A joint preconference workshop by Mary Stuart Hunter, National Resource Center Executive Director, and Catherine Andersen, University of Baltimore, at the European First-Year Experience Conference; June 15; Bergen, Norway.

E-Source Submission Guidelines

For complete guidelines and issue dates, see tech.sa.sc.edu/fye/esource/web/submission.php.

Audience: *E-Source* readers include academic and student affairs administrators and faculty from a variety of fields interested in student transitions. All types of institutions are represented in the readership.

Style: Articles, tables, figures, and references should adhere to APA (American Psychological Association) style.

E-Source does not publish endorsements of products for sale.

Format: Submissions should be sent via e-mail as a Microsoft Word attachment.

Length: Original feature-length articles should be 750-1,200 words. Annotations of new resources should be no more than 500 words. The editor reserves the right to edit submissions for length. Photographs are welcome.

Please address all questions and submissions to:

E-Source Editor

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Looking for new teaching strategies or fresh ideas for first-year seminars? *E-Source*, the National Resource Center's online newsletter for college transitions, offers a wealth of information. *E-Source* also is accepting submissions for the fall 2015 issue. To view the archives, review submission guidelines, and receive content alerts for new issues, please go to

www.sc.edu/fye/esource

Awards

Institutional Excellence for Students in Transition

The National Resource Center launched the 2015 award campaign recognizing institutional excellence for students in transition on April 15, 2015. The award is given annually to institutions that have designed and implemented outstanding collaborative initiatives enhancing significant transitions during the undergraduate experience. Award recipients will have demonstrated the effectiveness of the initiative in supporting student success, learning, and development at a variety of transition points beyond the first college year and in responding to unique institutional needs. Submission deadline is August 3, 2015. For more information, please visit the website at http://sc.edu/fye/awards/IE_Award.html.



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The Toolbox

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The Toolbox is an online professional development newsletter offering innovative, learner-centered strategies for empowering college students to achieve greater success. The newsletter is published six times a year by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.

The online subscription is free. To register for newsletter alerts and access back issues, please visit www.sc.edu/fye/toolbox.

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