

**2023
EDITION!**

TEACHING & LEARNING CONFERENCE TIPS

NDSU

OFFICE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

These tips are grounded in the idea of retention and are methods, ideas, and actions you can incorporate into your class. These tips are taken from the sessions offered in the 2023 Teaching and Learning Conference. References and citations for any data or statistics listed here can be found in the videos posted on our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/c/ndsuoatl.

What is Retention?

Often times the definition for retention focuses on post-course results as a way to quantify student numbers for retention. A shift from that is to a focus on the assignments in classes and how students can persist in a course. It is about student success in the present and how that carries students forward in their degree path and careers.

Mentorship

Increase mentorship opportunities. This establishes a community of peers and increases student confidence in the face of potential failure. This means students are more willing to ask questions and fail if they feel supported.

Why is Mentoring Important For Retention?

Three reasons are that it:

1. Enhances the overall experience for the student.
2. Improves class outcomes & productivity of students.
3. Establishes a community and network for students to work and thrive in.

Types of Mentoring

Hierarchical/Dyadic: Traditional mentoring from one mentor to multiple individuals.

Cyclic: Peer-to-peer mentoring where students work with and support each other.

Network: A newer model of mentoring where the student has multiple mentors from across different disciplines and levels.

*Cyclic and Network mentoring are shown as being more beneficial than the traditional model

Empathy

Teacher empathy, specifically, the degree to which you work to deeply understand and have care and concern for students, can positively impact learning, persistence, engagement, self-regulation, & post-graduation readiness.

Know Your Students

Getting to know students can help you better understand the issues that are prevalent in your classroom. One characteristic that is important to know is where students come from. Depending on their background, they might have issues and hurdles that keep them from succeeding and feeling a sense of belonging in the classroom. Understanding this and reaching out to students shows you care.

Be "That Person" For Students

Having one person that is truly listening and cares for a student can be a reason a student persists in their program. A student may be going through a hard time and associate this with their schooling at the university. Let them know those feelings are valid.

Understand Student Intimidation

Students often are scared to ask questions and feel intimidated by you. This may stop them from asking an important question that will help them get through a problem they are having. Letting students know, through empathy, that questions are never trivial and it is important to ask them, can help students feel more at ease in the classroom.

Cautions For Using Empathy

1. Bias: People tend to favor those who are more like themselves.
2. Stress: It makes empathy more difficult.
3. Burnout: Important to maintain a self/other distinction when considering other people's feelings and not feeling like you need to be empathetic 100% of the time.
4. Scope: Know what your scope of practice is. You are not a counselor, so make sure students know where to go on campus.
5. Power: Understand there is a lot of power between you and a student. Knowing student backgrounds is important but asking students to represent a whole cultural group may put too much pressure and create uncomfortable scenarios.

Accessibility

Accessibility goes beyond buildings and classrooms on campus with automatic doors and ramps to allow physical access. Students have different needs that can make it harder to achieve; they may have visual, auditory, or physical impairments that may hinder them from completing or working on an assignment, participating in a group, or actively listening during class.

Allow Students to Have a Part

Rather than you trying to build a static plan, students can be given a choice that lets them have an active part in moving their education forward. Using this method of instruction will not only help students achieve success and persist in their studies, it can also get them more involved and increase the quality of work they see as being more of their own design.

Remove Barriers

Learners come from different backgrounds and experiences that affect the way they learn. You may not see some of those barriers at the beginning of a course. An example of removing a barrier is, allowing a student who cannot type their essay to dictate it via Word or record their voice for the instructor to listen to. While this can be more work, it can also refresh a course in that it opens up new avenues for assignments to be completed.

The Why of Learning

If your course is not necessarily focused on building writing skills, students can be given multiple options for an assignment that does not have to be a typical essay or traditional research paper. Videos, magazine layouts, and podcasts are just some ways that assignments can engage in different ways and at different levels that still meet the why of an assignment.

The What of Learning

In what way is the information presented and accessed? Giving students options that go beyond traditional reading, like videos or PowerPoints with subtitles will allow students, who would otherwise not be able to engage with content, to be an active part in the class.

The How of Learning

Creating ways students can express themselves in their own unique way encourages students to be active with their coursework and feel attached to what they are being asked to do.

Guide to Accessibility

1. Make small manageable changes to your course and assignments. Start out with one assignment you tweak to slowly change your course and adapt it to the current cohort of students in your class.
2. Create and provide opportunities for feedback from students. This will help you identify issues and barriers in a class your students are grappling with.
3. Create opportunities to overcome and break down issues and barriers. This way, students can get to their learning and progress forward in a class and help you move forward in the class curriculum.

Community

Make connections to campus, programs, instructors and fellow students. It is important to help students feel like they are a part of a community. This was especially relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. Friends can make this connection which can last through an undergraduate experience. You can make lasting impacts that keep students rooted on their career path at NDSU.

How to Build Community

Small things to help students feel at home at NDSU are to:

1. Call out student names and actively engage them in the classroom.
2. Have in-depth conversations with students as an advisor which makes them feel appreciated and taken care of.
3. Make it known that students can meet with you outside of class which gives students the confidence to seek help and make them feel appreciated in their college community when they are struggling.
4. Offer an introduction which can show students a side of you students would not otherwise see. This shows them an instructor trusts them and wants to welcome them into the NDSU community.

Co-Create Class Expectations

Allow students the opportunity to understand and add to what the expectations of a class are. This gives them responsibility and helps them understand what their role as a student is and what the teacher's role is.

Tools to help Create Community

There are tools that can be used to facilitate group and individual work via an online platform. Consider learning more about these tools.

1. Flipgrid
2. Google Jamboards
3. Nearpod

Connect Before Content

Allow students time to engage with one another before engaging with content. This builds a sense of community and helps them understand where they might want to go with their career as they share knowledge and experiences with fellow students.

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Set the Tone

What do you want the class to feel like? Students should feel engaged and excited if that is what you want for the tone of your classroom. Bring in activities for students to do, which is a great way to set this tone.

1. **Check in Question:** Welcome students and build the classroom community by asking a casual question at the beginning of class. This is a great way to engage students right away and to get to know them better. E.g. What's your favorite book? If you could remove one stressor from your life, what would it be?
2. **Storytelling and Humor:** Add these into a lecture or lesson to help students feel appreciated and engaged because it shows them you are human and want to get to know students. Getting too serious about a topic can serve as a disconnect with students. Not being afraid to laugh and share experiences is key to developing a community that works toward the goal of learning and growing. E.g. Connect a lecture with your past experience that has a funny element
3. **Get Creative:** Mix things up by being creative in the classroom. E.g. Self-care day: snacks, pajamas, blankets, etc.; Competition: Jeopardy, Family Feud, Board Games, Door Prizes; Setting: go outside, walk the halls; Materials: Use Crayons, Play-Doh, rocks.

Belonging

Opening a lecture with a big smile and projecting empathy awakens students and makes them feel alive and a part of a community that cares.

E.g. Ask yourself questions like "Do students feel as though they belong?", "What is my part in that sense of belonging?", and "What intentions and actions are being reflected in my classroom?" These all give you a place to start when thinking about retention and how you can be an active part of influencing students in a positive way.

Showcase Optimism and Excitement

Hindering the building of community is the fact that some students feel and even know that some professors do not want to be in their classroom and that they would much rather be spending their time working on other things such as research. This makes it hard for students to feel that important connection to campus, especially when professors are blatant about how much they do not like teaching or dealing with undergraduates.

Be Honest About Courses

Generally, students do not understand what it really takes to teach a class at the undergraduate level. Being open with students without revealing too many personal or work-related details will key students in on just what it takes and will make them more sympathetic to your struggles and will encourage students to respect your time. This means if students know you cannot see them this week, they have an opportunity to plan ahead and be understanding of your busy schedule.

Course Materials

Make an easy to follow schedule and syllabus that are linked together with assignments makes the transition into the NDSU community easier since it gives them a clear structure to follow that guides them in a new environment that might seem daunting. Reassuring students with clear and concise materials like these opens up students by giving them a clear idea of what their place is in your classroom environment.

Checking in

Whether a class is online or in person, it is important to check in with students with reminders about upcoming important dates and assignments. Showing students you are thinking about them and the class increases a sense of belonging since it shows students you are putting effort in to making sure students are taken care of.

Student Careers

Laying out job prospects and opportunities for students in different programs is a great way to reassure students of the choices that they have made when considering their career after NDSU. Students will develop trust and respect for you if they feel that you have their best interests in mind.

Global Detail vs. Specific Detail

When you describe things in general to students and do not overwhelm them with minute details, students will get a good idea of what a program has to offer them. If they have further questions and are interested in a program, that is where you can step in and answer them.

Highlight Students and Alumni

Potential students want to see themselves in a program. Help them see this by highlighting successful students. This will attract students to a program that interests them and is a good fit for what they want out of a program.

Get NDSU Students Involved

NDSU students can share their experiences and passion for their program as a way to get prospective students talking and interested in NDSU programs. When NDSU students share details about their program in a way their advisor or instructor allows, this shows trust and responsibility, it also reaffirms the student's place at NDSU as a member of our community.

Miscellaneous Teaching Tips

Here are some tips every instructor should keep in mind!

Hybrid/Hyflex Courses

These courses can contribute to retention by providing students with flexible learning options and a personalized learning experience. There is more upfront preparation work for you for both of these options, but the pay off in time saved from not having to catch students up is more than worth it. If students know they can access recorded lectures online they will not have to try and piece together what happened from readings and notes. Students who seek to gain the most out of courses like these are ones who may have other commitments or responsibilities that take them away from their coursework and being able to attend in-person at a regularly scheduled time.

Examples of students who need or would benefit from these courses are students who are parents, are sick, work full-time, have health issues or disabilities, lost a family member or are having a family emergency.

Ungrading

When students focus on learning rather than solely the grades they retain information and get more value out of course content. This is especially true when considering that at the college level, their grade is their own responsibility. This means if there is an opportunity to guide from the sidelines and be solely a resource and mentor, those opportunities should be taken to encourage students to work and achieve through their own volition. Keeping this in mind, you should strive to provide extensive feedback to students.

Make Courses More Affordable

If you are able, give students open and free resources online via NDSU licenses, this can be a great way to avoid students having to buy textbooks. This ensures students who can not afford a textbook stay in class, since the materials and resources are free and easily accessible.

Alternative Assessments

Traditional assessments may not accurately reflect the full range of knowledge and skills students bring to a course. That is where alternative assessments can step in.

1. Offer multiple attempts on tests. If the goal is for students to learn, giving the opportunity to correct mistakes will facilitate that learning.
2. Reflect on work. By allowing students to reflect on their work and the progress of the course, students can go back and conceptualize their learning by ordering it and better understanding it as they seek to recall skills and knowledge learning.
3. Declaration quizzes add another way to give students an alternative path via assessment. These quizzes give students responsibility and trust by having them answer on a quiz whether they completed certain tasks. If they did then they are responsible for knowing that content.

Reasons to Look at the Syllabus

Give students a reason to look at the syllabus. Offer an assignment where students look for typos or a scavenger hunt. Students become familiar with content you want them to be familiar with.

Use Teams

Teams can be used in the following ways:

1. Establish community in a virtual environment where students who are spread throughout campus can talk to each other quick and easy.
2. Access a Resource Hub where resources can be posted for students to use whenever they need them.
3. Post workshop and webinar opportunities for students to access.
4. Provide networking and job opportunities for students so they can talk to professionals in the field and at the collegiate level.
5. Investigate engagement data so these different benefits of Teams can be understood and adapted to better suit students and faculty.

For more information or assistance, contact:

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