

Notes from the Table Discussions of Mission Possible: Motivating Students to Learn!

Motivation and Large/Small Classes

1. Tips for engaging large classes:
 - Pay attention to the students; make eye contact and walk around the room as you discuss the topics
 - Use clickers
 - Control distractions – e.g., prevent a student that's sitting near the front of the room from playing World of Warcraft
 - Use a different (perhaps non-lecture) format so that the class seems different from students' other classes. For example, play bingo with specific words that will be used during the discussion
 - Be democratic; let the students vote on exam dates, assignment formats, etc.
 - Let the students know when they are being a distraction to you or other students; use peer pressure to police distractions (students decide about acceptable behavior/consequences)
 - Learn student names
 - Send an introductory email before the course begins
 - Use real life examples
 - Alternate mini-lectures with discussion or problems
 - Demonstrations
 - Call on students so one or two don't dominate
 - Don't read from notes or book
 - Don't use monotone
 - Garner student input, if applicable
2. Realistic expectations for student motivation:
 - Engaging 100% of the students is unrealistic, but a "critical mass" is needed to make discussion worthwhile
3. Gauging motivation:
 - Periodically count the number of people texting or count the number of students making eye contact with you.

Motivation and Required, Non-Major Classes

- Establish personal connection – learn students' names
- Tell students what you struggled with as a student studying in that field
- Explain relevance of topic – it may not be relevant for their major, but as an educated individual in society, they need to know the information
- Help students identify their goals and link course work with goals
- Put the onus on students to develop intrinsic motivation – treat them like adults
- Make topics relevant to today's situations
- Show long-term benefits of understanding topic

- Use problem-based learning
- Maintain respect of students by being prepared for class
- Have compassion for students
- Connect with students' interests
- Preview content ahead and the upcoming value of what's to come in the course
- Re-connect ideas/skills/learning in a previous lesson with information in a current lesson
- Turn incorrect answers or mistakes into positive learning
- Look for ways to help students understand that they are not alone in struggling with a concept, skill or idea

Motivation and Cultural Issues

- Understand/explain cultural differences in the learning environment
- Establish communication with minority students (ethnic, gender, non-major, etc.)
- Use examples of minority students you know who are successful
- Take the holistic approach – some student issues extend beyond the classroom; direct them to the appropriate resources (such as counseling center)
- Help students see that you, the professor, are “human”
- Help students know it is OK to make mistakes on the road to learning
- Help students develop connections with other students
- Like what you are doing as an instructor – have passion for the material
- A positive attitude is critical and contagious; model behavior you want to see
- Add trivia or other facts to the content that specifically relate to minority students
- Show you care about students as well as about the subject
- Give students choices whenever possible
- Feed forward – not feedback. What can you do right on the next assignment?
- Incorporate Blackboard, wiki, blog presence in and outside of class
- Give reasonable expectations of progress; use scaffolding