

Building Faculty-Student Interaction

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From the literature, we know that learning can be enhanced in an active environment. Frequent interaction between students and faculty can improve comprehension of the course material, and can also develop a shared responsibility for learning. These interactions can happen inside or outside class time, and be formal or informal.

Some suggestions for encouraging faculty-student interaction might be to:

Arrive early and leave late.

Doing so can provide opportunities for interaction and for students to ask questions or express concerns.

Move around.

How many conferences have you attended where the format is exactly the same for every session? Sometimes even small variations can keep students' interest as well as your own.

- For a change of pace once in a while, consider starting your class from a location other than the front of the classroom and invite students to consider an issue along with you in order to convey the expectation that learning is a joint experience.
- Begin with a story or a recent news item that relates to the subject at hand.

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Encourage student involvement.

- Establish expectations about participation and what that means in your particular course. Evaluating participation can be a very subjective process, so if you are using this as a part of a grade, you should try to be as clear as possible about your expectations.
- Some students are less likely to volunteer in front of a group for many good reasons (fear, language barriers, gender, etc.,...) Because some students are less likely to raise their hand or volunteer in the large group, varying the type of participation possible is a good idea. Some of these students might engage in a smaller group format, or even through a blog, which allows them to formulate their thoughts before "speaking up."
- Request and encourage questions to emphasize that you genuinely value their input and thoughts. Clarify questions if you need to by saying "Do you mean that...?" or "I don't understand the question, could you rephrase that?"
- Listen intently to students' comments rather than dismiss them. Nothing shuts down participation more quickly than a student feeling embarrassed. Add to the students' ideas ("lateral thinking technique") so students feel their thoughts are valued.
- Address your answers to students' questions to the whole class and verify whether you sufficiently have answered their questions. You can simply ask: "Did I cover that?" or "Does that make sense?"

Encourage regular feedback.

- Stop the discussion five minutes before the class is scheduled to conclude. Pass out note cards or the [Minute Paper](#) format and ask that students write down what they felt was the most important information they learned that day and any questions they may have lingering.
- At the beginning of the next class, respond to the students' questions.
- Use eye contact as a means of determining a students' comprehension of material. If a student offers a questioning look, either clarify your last statement, or ask the class whether or not they are following you.

If class size permits, do not return tests and quizzes in class.

- Request that students pick up their assessments during your office hours. This provides an opportunity for informal discussion with your students.
- It also enables you to offer suggestions to students that may have done poorly on the test (e.g. clarification of material, recommendation to form study groups, meet with a tutor.)