

Five Suggestions for Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

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The earlier in the semester you identify problem areas, the more likely it is that you and the students will be successful in resolving them.

Supportive learning environments can validate the presence of individuals and encourage participation and involvement. No one likes to fail, and unfortunately it is often the students who most need help who are afraid to ask for it. The earlier in the semester you identify problem areas, the more likely it is that you and the students will be successful in resolving them.

1. When possible, be constructive when reviewing student papers and exams

We all like to do well. Congratulate students who did well. Offer help to those students who did not do as well and extend an invitation to come and talk and get help with study strategies. As a reminder that learning is the goal, consider allowing students to rewrite papers as a means of coaching students who are still learning the writing process.

2. Suggestions for helping students who are having difficulty in the course

- You may need to reach out to students who would benefit from advice and guidance but do not seek it out.
- Advise students to form small study groups – this not only helps to reinforce topics covered in class, but has the added benefit of contributing to a positive class climate.
- Advise students who need it to work with a tutor. At Tufts, the Academic Resource Center is available to support students who need help.

<http://uss.tufts.edu/arc/>

3. Make yourself available outside of class. There are multiple ways that you can make this happen, so be creative and find what works for you.

- Make yourself available in your office during certain office hours.
- Designate a room in your building as a “drop-in” room (less intimidating than a professor’s office).
- If preferred, simply announce you will be checking email and responding during your office hours.
- Set up an on-line course “chat room”.
- Offer a regular weekly extra meeting.
- Pass around a sign-up sheet during the first class. Those students interested in an additional opportunity to learn and provide feedback may sign up. The meeting time is always the same and you make it clear that this not intended for extra credit.

4. Offer review sessions outside of class

Before the first exam, consider holding an evening review session. It may be required for freshmen and optional for others. If essays are part of your upcoming assessment, spend a few minutes describing how best to answer an essay question and provide old essay exams for students to read and interpret. This will help them to think more critically and respond with greater precision when writing their essays. It will also help you to develop a rubric for evaluating student work.

5. Post past exams on a class website

Past exams can provide students with an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the format, level of detail, number of questions, your style, etc. Posting is important because it enables all students to have the same opportunity to review them, and it can give students for whom English is not their first language the same opportunity for review.