



Adjunct Faculty Academic Calendar

<u>6/15</u>	Last Day to Withdraw with a "W" Grade
<u>6/30</u>	Classes, Final Exams End
<u>7/2</u>	Summer Classes Begin
<u>7/3</u>	Spring Grades Due to Registrar by noon
<u>7/4</u>	Independence Day – No Classes

Workshops

<u>6/6</u>	Increase Student Engagement with Lecture Capture 2:00 PM Z115
<u>6/13</u>	Collect Student Responses with iClickers 11:00 AM Z115

Register for these and other workshops at:

Save the Date
Adjunct Faculty
All University Orientation
Thursday, August 17th
Look for more info. to follow!

Motivating Your Students to Succeed

Each New Year, many of us resolve to make some personal changes. These resolutions might be in the form of eating a healthier diet, getting more exercise, or cleaning out that closet brimming with unused stuff. Nevertheless, despite making such resolutions we are often unable to carry them out. This might also be the case for some of our students. Often, students begin the semester resolving to be better in their student role, only to find that their resolve lacks traction. Psychologists call this a problem of volition. Much research has been done looking at those factors which motivate our students to learn, but little has been done on volition or their ability to carry through with their goal. However, one study found there are three volitional strategies that might help students succeed (McCann & Garcia, 1999). The first strategy involves self-efficacy. In this strategy students need to be encouraged to believe they can finish their work successfully. The second is the use of stress-reducing strategies. Our students are often so over whelmed with balancing their lives that they stress out! When students begin to feel stressed, often causing a kind of paralysis, they need to learn how to relax or refocus on the positive. Finally, it is important for students to envision what it would mean if an assignment, project, or study effort was not achieved and what the consequences of noncompletion might mean for them personally. According to the authors this involves making students do a reality check on their lack of volition.

How can we, as faculty, help? We need to help our students regulate their motivation so that they can succeed. One way we can help with this is by offering positive reinforcement; telling them that they can succeed if they study hard and get help when needed. Another is to help our students with their time management. Procrastination is often a result of a fear of failure and can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If our students learn to regulate their time, they will be better able to also regulate their motivation. Finally, help them execute a reality check on what might happen if they don't regulate their motivation. In the end, we can help our students succeed if we keep these practices in mind and use them in student/teacher Interactions.

References:

McCann, E. & Garcia, T. (1999). Maintaining motivation and regulating emotion: Measuring individual differences in academic volitional strategies. *Learning and Individual Differences, 11* (3), 259-279.

How Prior Knowledge Can Help or Hinder Learning

What is the first image that comes to mind in association with the word, “cardinal”? What did you think of? Was it the St. Louis Cardinals, a Vatican Conclave, *Cardinalis cardinalis* in the family *Cardinalidae*, or the SVSU mascot? In asking this question, one important piece was missing. That piece is context. In the absence of context whatever association you made was based on prior knowledge. As faculty, we need to be aware of our students’ prior knowledge, good or bad, and understand that students need context in order to interpret new knowledge. Prior knowledge influences a student’s ability to learn as new knowledge is built upon what is already known and this prior knowledge influences her perception of new information.

Prior knowledge and learning

In our classrooms, students are bombarded with the jargon that is embedded in our disciplines. When presented with this jargon, or terms and concepts, students may not have the prior knowledge necessary for learning to occur. This then creates a situation where our students’ ability to digest the new material is hampered. Just imagine a student in a sociology course where such terms as rationality, *Gemeinschaft*, or functionalism are thrown around. The student having never had a sociology course might have no idea what these concepts mean. So, after listening to the professor lecture for fifteen minutes this student might begin to feel ignorant which is certainly not the intent. This is an important consideration because students in such situations might turn you off and eventually fail.

Good or faulty prior knowledge

Students in possession of good or valid prior knowledge, when employed in context, can create rich connections allowing new information to be hooked to existing knowledge. However, students in possession of faulty knowledge might have to unlearn to learn. This means that facts and truths always need to be presented, in either case, to allow the new information to be absorbed.

What can I do as an instructor do to help students learn?

It is helpful for faculty to begin by learning what prior knowledge your students possess in relation to your course and its content. Some questions to consider are: “What are their common experiences? Are they all from similar backgrounds, similar environments? How will that affect the way they interpret the content? Do they have common aspirations or goals? What does this tell you about the prior knowledge they will bring to class?” (Svinicki, 1993). You might consider starting each class with a pre-test to gauge your students’ prior knowledge. You can also intentionally use prior knowledge to get your students’ heads in the game. You can do this by reviewing what was done in the last class or by going over the latest reading assignment. In introducing new ideas, give examples from pop-culture or relevant news, as means of pulling out knowledge they might already possess. Try to tell a story and link it to the presentation of new knowledge. As you do this, also be mindful to check for faulty prior knowledge so that it won’t detract from learning.

The lesson

Our students do not enter our classrooms as blank slates. They bring with them a body of experience. It is our job to try to connect these experiences to new information by providing context. In understanding this and intentionally trying to create that linkage, our students can succeed.

Reference:

Svinicki, M. (1993-1994). What they don’t know can hurt them: The role of prior knowledge in learning. *Essays on Teaching Excellence-Toward the Best in the Academy* 5 (4). Accessed from: <https://grad.uic.edu/uic-ta-handbook-what-they-dont-know-can-hurt-them-role-prior-knowledge-learning>