

Summer Pedagogy Partnerships: Student Partner Insights and Recommendations

The Human Dimension

Communicating Compassionately with Students

Overarching reflections and insights:

- Students are experiencing drastically different circumstances and should not be expected to apologize for them if they impact the student's learning
- Educators should care about their students' personal lives and facilitate non-academic conversations
- Critical to trust students when handling requests for extensions

Recommendations

- Check in with students
 - When to use: Weekly-ish, should be preemptive
 - Pedagogical benefits: Gives the educator a better sense of how students are doing, lets the class know that the educator cares about their wellbeing
 - Potential challenges/drawbacks/problems: Some students may be unresponsive or averse to these check-ins
- Facilitate non-academic, destressing conversations (especially with each other) and compile other resources
 - When to use: When the educator can detect a sense of burnout (students hesitant/tired of talking), when students bring up important but off-topic conversations
 - Pedagogical benefits: Students know that the educator cares, they have the chance to gain their footing by not overexerting themselves, they have access to important mental health resources, promotes the idea of self-care
 - Potential challenges/drawbacks/problems: Might be difficult to balance academic/non-academic conversations (potential solution: give space for these non-academic conversations at the end of class)
- Show trust in your students through assignment flexibility
 - When to use: Throughout the entire course

- Pedagogical benefits: Students know that the educator cares and have the chance to not fall behind on their work due to extenuating circumstances, promotes mutual understanding and communication within the class
- Potential challenges/drawbacks/problems: Disruption of the course timeline, perceived unfairness if rules are different for students who ask for extensions (some professors believe extensions make it unfair for other students), some assignments might be impossible or difficult to change
 - Re: perceived unfairness of extensions, if students are working in different environments with different difficulties/obligations, they might need different accommodations through extensions or modification of assignments. Not all differences in rules/extensions are unfair, sometimes extensions or assignment modifications are the fairest options given students' varying circumstances. Follow the principles of Universal Design for Learning by ensuring that most of the students' needs are met before they need to ask for help

Hope Matters

Overarching reflections and insights:

- We should connect emotionally, not just intellectually
- Balance rigor and support. Students might need more support than rigor

Recommendations:

- Don't increase the amount of work required of students
 - When to use: Throughout the course
 - From a student partner: "Encouraging students to talk to you about how they're faring with the course materials and assignments is a good way to get an idea about how you can help them. Some students are not used to asking for extensions and may put too much pressure on themselves trying to keep up with deadlines, so it is necessary to let them know that you are ready to listen to and accept their requests for extension and also talk about the reasons if they want to. Sometimes students also think their reasons will not be good enough for the instructor so giving them a listening ear validates them."
 - Pedagogical benefits: Students facing difficulties completing work would be further disadvantaged by an increased workload. Students with additional obligations in their new learning/living environments might have less time or ability to complete work. Accepting a loss of rigor/lessening the workload can help students at least complete some work, rather than falling behind

- Potential challenges/drawbacks/problems: Even if you do not intend to increase the workload, sometimes the necessary changes to assignments under changing learning circumstances mean that the new ways of working will take longer
- From a student partner: “For my classes that were pre-recorded, they often became more work because lectures went on longer than they would in-person. It is also harder to sit and pay attention in a learning environment that one is not used to (ie. home). Increasing the amount of assignments would only pile on top of an increase in the time it takes to finish lectures.”
- Use hopeful and optimistic language, casual/lighthearted comments
 - When to use: Throughout the course
 - Pedagogical benefits: Students may be more hopeful/look forward to the future, offers a sense of continuity. Humor and lighthearted comments add some positivity to the class, and are a brief relief from more serious/somber topics
 - Potential challenges/drawbacks/problems: Overly optimistic language may seem insincere. Sometimes it’s better to be modest in your claims, so you don’t get people’s hopes up only to disappoint them. It is often helpful to acknowledge the unfortunate realities of our situation and the losses/unrealized hopes
- Tell students you are there to support them and ask how you can help
 - When to use: Throughout the course, esp. if students seem stressed
 - Pedagogical benefits: Students feel heard and that their input and feelings are valued. Students who might not ask for help on their own might be encouraged to seek additional support
 - Potential challenges/drawbacks/problems: You should recognize your limits in the support you can offer given your other commitments/challenges, and ensure that the student has other sources of support
 - From a student partner: “To do this, I suggest the instructor becomes aware of what resources are needed for different students. The instructor can give the option to the students to ask about resources which the instructor thinks will be helpful in this difficult time. For instance, sometimes domestic students and international students need entirely different resources. It is the same with documented and undocumented students. Being aware of this will avoid situations where the resources spoken about only favor some groups of students and make the others feel left out.”
- Talk about the pandemic
 - When to use: Periodically, when it seems there are discussion-worthy changes
 - Pedagogical benefits: Acknowledges that everyone is facing uncertainties and difficulties. Shows that you are aware of and care about the situation, as it can seem odd to ignore significant events and continue with class as usual
 - Potential challenges/drawbacks/problems: Class can often be a distraction from pandemic worries, so talking about the pandemic too much might be distressing

- Create opportunities (in class or through discussion boards/other platforms) for students to talk with one another
 - When to use: Throughout the course
 - Pedagogical benefits: Reminds students they are still part of a community, supplements the on-campus relationships they might have lost/lessened through remote learning conditions, encourages students to support one another
 - Potential challenges/drawbacks/problems: If the additional discussion forums are required, it might be difficult for students to take on additional assignments, especially if they seem inessential to the course