

Faculty Best Practices in Teaching First-Year Students and those in Transition

First-year students are novice learners who need extra guidance from faculty in understanding our expectations for them and in knowing what and how to learn. The following practices have been shown to be effective here and in the research literature in motivating students and guiding them to more successful approaches. We strongly encourage faculty to adopt as many of these strategies as they can in classes that include a significant number of first-year students. You may find that all your students benefit!

Essential Practices

1. Tell students that you believe in them and think that they can succeed in the course with hard work—help them realize that intelligence is not fixed but improves with study.
2. Use the gradebook function in Blackboard so students know their grades at all times.
3. Submit First-Year Intervention (FYI) alerts for students who are at risk of doing poorly in the course and do so as early in the reporting process as possible.
4. Reward/utilize attendance in a manner that is relevant to your course.
5. Give a substantive assessment such as a quiz or paper early in the semester (first four weeks) so students know how they're doing in time to make changes to their habits and improve going forward.
6. Reach out personally to students who don't do well on tests to offer support and resources.
7. Make a good faith effort to learn students' names and/or use table tents in large classes. Students feel more positive and try harder in classes when they feel that instructors know them and care.
8. Provide time in class for students to learn and practice metacognitive learning strategies and receive feedback; if you have undergraduate or graduate peer leaders, use them during small group or discussion times to guide students in their use of metacognitive strategies, give feedback, and encourage metacognitive strategy use as a habit. Consider requiring or incentivizing metacognitive strategy use in some way.
9. Use collaborative, active approaches in class (think-pair-share, group work) to create community and cultivate learning.
10. Be transparent about your expectations for students by sharing learning objectives for each class or unit and assess students' performance based on the learning objectives. Give clear expectations for assignments and feedback on how students can improve.

Highly Recommended Practices

1. Consider collecting midterm feedback from students about their experience in the class and how these approaches are working for them. Talk with the class about their feedback and incorporate changes you think are warranted based on their responses.
2. Normalize help-seeking as a positive approach to learning and encourage all students to avail themselves of extra help. Reinforce the use of all of UMBC's resources that include but are not limited to their advisor, instructor's office hours, support areas within the Academic Success Center, peer leaders, health and wellness resources, and many more. Keep holistic health in mind as students develop effective learning strategies that lead them to successful outcomes in their courses and other activities.
3. Have former students come into class and share the study habits they found effective — peer-to-peer advice can be powerful.

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