

Building a Retention-Friendly Classroom

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Retention Basics

- *Retention is a university's ability to keep its students until they graduate.*
- Retention is about connection: academic and social.
- Retention can't be directly addressed—it's a function of the student experience.

The University/Student Relationship

Consider these three models:

Restaurant Server/Patron

“My job is to keep you happy.”

Personal Trainer/Client

“My job is to help you grow.”

Drill Sergeant/Military Recruit

“My job is to put you through a difficult test.”

An Overview

Retention is about doing little things well.

Success is not about doing extraordinary things. It is about doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.
– John W. Gardner

We're all doing some of these things already.

Pat yourself on the back! (And choose a new tactic to try.)

No one can do *everything* on this list.

But we can start doing any of them this afternoon.

Take Attendance

- Students who attend class are more likely to persist to graduation.
- Simply pass around a piece of paper with the course number, section, and date.
- Record in Blackboard later (or don't).
- Just taking attendance sends a message: *your presence matters to me.*

Normalize Struggle

- In all human systems, growth requires stress.
- Many Truman students see stress as a sign of inadequacy (*fixed mindset*).
- Reiterate: struggling is normal, and failure leads to growth (*growth mindset*).
- Share your own difficulties, past or current.

Build Community

Get to Know Them

- Learn students' names and use them in class.
- Give each student an index card and ask them to record their name, their major, and something they'd like you to know.

Help Them Get to Know You

- Tell them about your life—they are curious!
- Private? Pick one aspect of your personal life to reference regularly.

Help Them Get to Know Each Other

- Think/pair/share.
- Embrace group work.

Help Students Know Where They Stand

- Give short daily assessments, even if not graded.
- Keep grades in Blackboard, or don't—but make it easy for students to learn their current grade.
- Grade quickly.
- Reply to all emails.

Create Opportunities to Praise Students

- Regularly ask different students to stay after class, then compliment them on their work.
- Offer nominal extra credit for attending office hours.
- Let them teach *you*, occasionally—individually or as a class—on a subject where they're an expert and you're a novice.

Set Expectations

This is crucial with first- and second-year students.

- “This problem set should take an hour or so. If it takes more than two hours, come see me.”
- “This is the hardest unit in the course.”
- “The rest of the class builds on the concepts we covered in this chapter. If your understanding is still a bit shaky, come to my office hours this afternoon.”
- “You should start studying for the midterm this weekend.”
- “This final project will take 20-25 hours of real, focused work.”
- Consider creating a 1-2 page “course guide”:
<http://jneitzke.sites.truman.edu/home/cs-170-summer/>.

Teach Freshmen How to Be College Students

Truman freshmen have asked me whether their fall classes last the entire school year and whether they have to use capital letters when writing a paper.

- Break down big projects for them.
- Tell students how to address you.
- Talk about professional email etiquette.
- Walk them through the devastating math of taking a 0 on an assignment.

Reach Out to Struggling Students

- Email: “We’ve missed you in class lately, and I wanted to check in and ask how you’re doing.”
- TruView: Any-Time, Any-Student Warning.
- Students of Concern (<http://soc.truman.edu>).
- Send individual student names to me at vieker@truman.edu.

Teach Students How to Learn

- Learning techniques are *somewhat* discipline-specific.
- Productivity = intensity of focus * time spent.
 - *Focus* is the secret of the relaxed high performer.
 - When you work, work. When you play, play.
- Replace re-reading with self-quizzing.
- Practice often precedes comprehension
 - Learning is like playing the piano: you must put the hours in.
- Learn by pretending to teach others (The Feynman Technique)

Conclusion

- With younger students, assume no familiarity with academic culture.
- Provide frequent feedback.
- Teach students how to learn.
- Students want to connect, though they don't always show it.

References

- Brown, P. C., McDaniel, M. A., & Roediger, H. L. (2014). *Make it stick: the science of successful learning*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Newport, C. (2007). *How to become a straight-A student: the unconventional strategies real college students use to score high while studying less*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Pattengale, Jerry. (2010). *What Faculty Members Need to Know About Retention* [White paper]. Retrieved from Baylor University: <https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/231350.pdf>

Discussion

- These slides are available at <http://vieker.sites.truman.edu/talks>.
- What have your experiences been?