

Notes from Student-Faculty-Staff Conversation on Learner Autonomy Sept. 16, 2008
Student Services Bldg (Rm 375) from 12:30 – 1:45

Introductions and acknowledgements by Dr. Patricia Jarvis, Psychology, and Soti Summer Scholar

Event sponsored by the Cross Chair for SoTL, Dr. Kathleen McKinney

The following issues were discussed:

What is learner autonomy?

- Identify what is interesting and find creative ways to initiate learning
- Professor: guide and direct learning process, realize students have responsibility to do the actual learning. Instructors' role is to facilitate learning for students.
- Have interest or find/make something interesting
 - Find ways to apply to self
 - Think of how it could effect or interest you
- Feeling ill-prepared or well-equipped can serve as motivation

What do high autonomous learners look like?

- Persistent
- Inquisitive
- Stay curious/suspend judgment
- Read a lot- or more than required

How do autonomous learners act?

- Ask questions
- Participate
- Show up for class
- See out-of-class experiences
- Honors/research opportunities

What are motivations?

- Set high/realistic goals
- Lifelong learners
- Interested in self-improvement
- Follow-up to move to next step
- Never completely satisfied (need to know more, want to move forward)
- Internal/intrinsic motivation (joy of knowing)

Do students and faculty agree on ideas?

- Non-autonomous don't have same priorities
- Difficult to balance priorities when everything is interesting
- Faculty have different priorities from students and don't always help students balance priorities to stay motivated.
 - Beneficial when teacher's acknowledge that their class is not the only important class in a student's schedule

- Students themselves might not have same goals/priorities as other students, and priorities change over time.
- What appeals to students may not mesh with learning styles

What are implications for courses?

- Faculty need to work to motivate, make autonomous (start on day 1 and build from there)
 - First day of course is more of an open discussion to get students connected to the course
- Can show how material will apply and see big picture beyond classroom
 - Paint a picture of how what happens now can connect later in life.

What are implications for professors?

- Variety of assignments (students tend to enjoy more)
- Simply ask students how they are doing, what they need, etc.
 - Talk at beginning of class to “check-in” with students
- Make connections to real life
- Show empathy for students and their education.
 - Be more concerned with them actually learning the material than following the schedule of topics.
 - Be willing to take extra time to slow down and go over topic again

What are implications for students?

- Continue education beyond college
- Harsh instructor—decline in autonomy and increase in test anxiety
- What predicted changes in autonomy in the classroom had to do with the professor?

What are implications for Staff?

- Autonomous vs. too controlling/independent
- As an advisor of admissions, (paraphrased) sometimes autonomy too much autonomy can be negative. Example: the students who don't even want to meet with advisor, they do everything on their own and then miss out on vital information.
- Careers in psychology course: the idea is to give students enough information so that they can be autonomous and make their own career choices.

What are implications for learning?

- Students feel that they will do better in a class that is more autonomous, however not too loosely structured.

What discourages autonomy?

- Lack of structure or loose structure can cause panic
- Spoon-fed course work and grades can be bad (over-structured)
- Instructors who are disorganized and always switching assignments, due dates, and tests dates.
 - Do not follow through with what they have outlined for course (syllabus, schedule, topics to be covered)
- Teachers who are discouraging and negative towards students, becomes and unlearning environment

What promotes autonomy?

- Methods to apply/authentic tasks or activities
- Real-world application
- Assessments that apply knowledge to self experiences
- One-minute paper/test

What can professors do to promote autonomy?

- Helpful when professor is genuine and eager to help a student, without judgment
- Always available during their designated office hours.