

Teaching

A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty No. 14

The Top 10...

Helping Students Stay the Journey

What role does your course play in your students' college careers? It is often dismaying how little students know about their own degree program or where our course fits. This causes hit-or-miss course selection, confusion about course sequencing, taking unnecessary courses – all mistakes that too often result in dropping out. We can change this dynamic by teaching our students how to take an active role in planning and managing their college careers.

- ✓ Ask your students to identify what degree/certificate they are enrolled in. If there are students not formally enrolled in a degree explain why it is important to select one, even if it is a temporary decision – point out that they can always change degrees! (This is important because students in a specific degree are more likely to stay in college).
- ✓ Based upon the information immediately above, bring appropriate degree/certificate requirement sheets to class. Show students what requirement your course fulfills. Next, have them check off other courses they have completed or are enrolled in. This particularly helps students new to higher education understand how degree programs work, and encourages them to be active in academic planning by identifying what else they must complete to get their degree/certificate.
- ✓ Invite a college counselor, a transfer advisor or a program coordinator to visit with your students to discuss degree programs, transfer articulation agreements and the like, either in person or online.
- ✓ Ask students to write down the name of the counselor/faculty advisor they talk with about courses. For all those who do not have a specific name, mention that it is beneficial to work with a consistent person who knows the student and understands her/his strengths and weaknesses.

- ✓ To get students thinking about the future, ask them to identify 20 careers that robots (or other technology-based systems) will possibly wipe out in the next 20 years. Have students brainstorm ideas about how they can stay ahead of developments and the kinds of skills that will be needed to work with future technologies.
- ✓ Talk with your students about course sequences and what course numbers mean. For example, we know that lower 100 level courses are introductory, but many students do not. Mentioning that course numbers often relate to how students should progress through a subject/discipline and that 100-level courses should be taken first helps students avoid jumping into advanced courses without adequate preparation.
- ✓ Especially if you teach a 100-level course, put students in small groups to share how to find course descriptions at the college website (mention how important it is to **read** course descriptions!), check prerequisites (tell them what a prerequisite is), find next term's classes and times, etc.
- ✓ Show students how to access their personal information, and get an updated unofficial transcript. If the college has a "transfer admissions page" of articulation agreements with other colleges, show them how to access that as well.
- ✓ As a class identify key criteria to use when evaluating transfer institutions and the best people to get information from. Unfortunately, many students base transfer decisions upon information from unreliable sources. Make sure to provide your valuable input!
- ✓ Have students identify transfer institutions that interest them, and give three reasons why they are looking at each institution, along with the degree(s) they are thinking of pursuing. Then, form student groups based upon **differences** in where they want to transfer to discuss their choices – focusing upon institutional strengths **and** weaknesses. Ask students to be skeptics, helping their classmates justify their choices. Have students not interested in transferring identify how their potential careers will change over the next 20 years, then compare ideas about how college can help them develop needed new skills.

Thanks to Jill Rushbrook, Director of Counseling at Asnuntuck, for assistance!