



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## COLLEGE 101: A COURSE FOR COLLEGE SUCCESS

I am a life guard. I am standing at the side of a swimming pool. The water where I am standing is only one foot deep. I look around and see people in swim suits doing cannon balls into the shallow water. "Stop!" I scream. "You'll get hurt!" But the people completely disregard my warnings and dive into the water. Who are these people? Why aren't they listening to me? Don't they know how dangerous this is? I am panic stricken. I look around and soon recognize their faces. It's my COL 101 class!

This describes a dream, or should I say nightmare, I had recently. What did it mean? What was happening? What had gone wrong?

As a veteran instructor with more than 20 years of teaching experience, I was looking forward to teaching COL 101—a required freshman course designed to help students succeed in college. I had long suspected that many students came to college unprepared. They had trouble managing their time, reading the syllabus, studying, taking notes, and making good decisions. I saw this class as the missing link. It contained many of the life skills necessary for success. However, soon after the class began, my worst suspicions were realized.

Students were telling me they did not need to learn to manage their time, that they really did not need to improve their study skills because they did not even study. One young man proudly told me that he really did not need to buy the books for his classes. He did not read them! So what was going wrong? What could I do?

To stay afloat in this class, I soon learned I had to change my tactics. What was working? What was not? Unlike the students in the career program I typically teach, these students did not want to be in the course. They did not value the class. They were required to be there. I had to prove to them that this material was important. I soon discovered that students who resisted change were less likely to discuss, reflect, and react positively. I had to change the format from a "read, think, and reflect" class to a "move and experience"

class. Rather than thinking introspectively about the material, students needed to become more actively involved.

Prior to teaching this course, the COL 101 committee provided some training for me and the other new COL 101 instructors. We were given a sample syllabus and many lesson plans. At the end of the semester, we were asked to share our ideas with the next group of new COL 101 instructors. After teaching the course for one semester, I have gained some insights into what I would do the next time I teach the class.

### What I Would Change

1. *Take ownership of the class from the beginning.* I would change the generic syllabus. While this syllabus worked well for some, it did not work for me. I would adopt a syllabus which better matched my teaching style, one in which assignments and policies were stated clearly.

2. *Eliminate reaction papers.* Students did not want to reflect on what was not important to them. I would reinforce the importance of this class as it applies to their lives, give more concrete assignments (such as short quizzes), and tie the course work to the classes they are taking currently.

### What I Would Not Change

1. *Scavenger hunt.* The first day of class the students are given the opportunity to get to know one another and investigate the college. They are given a list of various places in the college that they must locate—such as the testing center, writing center, disability center, etc. Then they leave the classroom and roam around searching for the various locations. Once they find a destination that is on their list, they ask an employee for a signature. The last place on the list is my office where I am waiting. I collect their papers, see how they fared, answer questions, and begin to develop a relationship with them.

2. *Values auction.* Students are given a list of values and asked to select their top ten. Next, they rank them in order of priority. The values include being honest, having a long and healthy life, enjoying plenty of leisure time, living a life with meaning, and having a good



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physical appearance. Students receive 5,000 life units. These life units represent student time, energy, and talents—what they have available to invest in themselves. Students prepare a budget using these 5,000 life units, and the bidding begins. As the auction progresses, they change or reassess their budgets. The student who bids the highest wins that value. This activity taught me a lot about what was important to the students. It forced them to think about their values and priorities in life. We referred to this activity frequently throughout the course.

3. *Pick a career.* Students pick various careers out of a hat. If they select a job they like, they explain to the class why the job appeals to them. If they select a job they dislike, they can try to trade with someone else. (At this point, they must convince others why they would be good at someone else's job or why they would enjoy the benefits of the job they selected.)

### Looking Back

Would I teach COL 101 again? Definitely. It was one of the best learning experiences I have had in a long time. It taught me new things, and it confirmed many of the things I already knew. How many students benefited from the course? Probably only three or four found it useful immediately, but I planted many seeds. Although some students may not see the value of the topics in the course at this point, that will change as their lives become more complicated and they need to make new choices. Was this approach successful? I don't think I inspired any future long-distance swimmers, but I may have kept a few from drowning!

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