



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## CAN WE TALK?: FACILITATING SUCCESSFUL FACULTY- STUDENT VISITS

Lack of engagement between students and faculty has been a personal and professional concern for some time. Over the years I have noticed that many students who were experiencing problems in my classes either waited too long into the semester to seek my help or never visited with me to discuss strategies that could have helped them with course assignments. I wanted to do something that would encourage them to seek out their instructors, via office hours, early and often during the semester to avoid and/or minimize pitfalls to academic success.

In order to facilitate more dialogue between faculty and students, I decided to incorporate mandatory faculty visits into my Psychology—Learning Framework course. As a psychology instructor, I realize that producing student behavior that ensures success in their academic, personal, or professional lives will not happen—in most cases—without properly manipulating the variables. In other words, most students are not going to do something just because we tell them to do it. This course requirement served as a short-term motivational incentive and a long-term behavioral modifier to help students cultivate the habit of visiting faculty.

To prepare students for their faculty visits, I provide them with an interactive teaching session on how to conduct a successful faculty visit. I demonstrate with a role-playing exercise. I want students to get a panoramic view of the faculty visitation experience. This exercise allows them to see their individual strengths and weaknesses as well as empathize with the instructor's perspectives regarding their academic progress and goals.

In addition, I have in-depth discussions with students about the psychological, personal, and academic rewards that these visits can produce. I include a question-and-answer session to allow them to discuss and, hopefully, minimize concerns and anxiety they may

have about the faculty member and/or the visit, prior to having it. Students are instructed to formulate and write down their concerns and questions before they visit instructors.

Students are told that the purposes of these visits are:

- To establish and solidify rapport between faculty and student (My goal is to help faculty and students get to know each other better.)
- To help students discuss and resolve concerns they may have about course assignments
- To develop the habit of visiting with instructors on a regular basis.

My students are required to meet with me, as well as all faculty members with whom they are taking classes, twice during the semester. They are to spread out their visits (about 30-45 days apart) to allow sufficient time to assess the results of the two visits adequately. This gives the student and me an opportunity to compare faculty comments and to strategize and establish a course of action to improve academic performance.

I provide students with a Faculty Visitation Form, which is divided into two parts: Faculty Comments and Student Response. The Faculty Comments section allows faculty to assess students' academic progress. It also allows them to share their recommendations about how the student might improve. In addition, faculty are asked to address observed and documented attitudinal or behavioral matters such as "excessive absences or tardiness" that are impacting the student's performance negatively.

The Student Response section allows students to comment on faculty recommendations regarding their weaknesses and strengths. They are instructed to document, in bullet format, the strategies they will utilize to address their shortcomings as well how they will cognitively and/or behaviorally process instructor recommendations to improve academic performance.

I have discovered that reviewing and comparing information from faculty across our campus have been extremely beneficial. Reviews and comparisons help me and students identify academic trends or behavioral patterns that could lead to failing a course or withdrawing from school. Students can collaborate



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with me to work toward behavioral, academic, and attitudinal goals/modifications to improve their overall performance.

I have discovered that students begin to incorporate recommended changes and improve their grades in some areas. Faculty and student comments on the faculty visitation forms are used as “drivers” for modifying course content and pedagogical methods to meet students’ academic needs better.

The most rewarding outcome of this course requirement—other than facilitating successful student and faculty interaction—is that even after completing my course some students have shared that they continued to use the forms with instructors in subsequent courses. And a number of my colleagues, especially those who teach developmental courses, appreciate and support these mandatory faculty visits. I shall continue using this tool as a means of helping bridge the gaps between faculty and students and facilitating student academic success.

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