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THE 75-PERCENT RULE

I have been in the education profession for 20 years as a middle school math teacher, high school football coach, junior high basketball coach, math team coach, assistant principal at a middle school and elementary school, and adjunct instructor. For the past 10 years, I have been a full-time math instructor and education advisor at a community college. These experiences have given me wonderful insights into techniques for helping students succeed. I have learned that effective teaching requires instruction that is engaging and has students feeling as though they are involved in the class discussion at all times. This is very difficult to effect and requires an instructor who truly cares that each student is engaged and on task.

Not all students come to class loving math. When they leave, they still may not (even though it breaks my heart). From the beginning, I tell students what is expected of them and that my class is going to help them achieve their goal of passing with as high an average as their ability to do the work allows. Students making a grade below their goal or below a 75 on a test are to come see me before their next test. This is known, from the first day, as the 75-percent rule.

I have noticed through the years that students with an 80 average or better are likely to pass the final exam and be successful in the next math class they take. It makes sense that if a student makes below a 75 on a test and does not start doing something different, things will not change for the better. Students are asked to stay after class or contact me, and we set up a day and time that they can meet with me one-on-one and learn about the Grade Improvement Check Off Sheet (GICOS).

The GICOS outlines 12 actions that past students have said helped them improve their grades. I have modified the list throughout the years (and will probably make changes in the future). As we discuss each action item, students tell me how they will implement it.

Read chapter. I ask students to read the assigned chapter before coming to class. This gives them a feel for what we will be covering and makes them more comfortable during the discussion.

Copy the slides we will be covering in class. I put each slide that we will cover during the entire semester on our college website so students do not have to copy the problems in class. This relieves stress. They can concentrate on how to work the problems, not spend time copying them.

Copy notes and rules on slides in class. Writing the rules and notes on the slides helps students with their review and homework (kinesthetic learning).

Go home and review slides. Students go home and look over the slides until they feel confident.

Copy extra slideshow. Students are to complete an extra copy of the slideshow we covered in class without looking back at notes. They do this until they get all slides correct without looking back at their notes. (The more you practice, the better you get.)

Do homework. Problems I assign for homework are considered practice tests. Students are not to do homework until they master slideshow problems.

Prepare for tests. Students study old tests, slideshows, and homework from the current chapter.

Go online, check answers to the test, and make corrections. Students take a copy of their answers home after they complete a test. I work each problem on their test step-by-step and provide answers to them on the college website by the end of the test day. Students love the instant feedback. I want them to see mistakes they made while the test is fresh on their minds. Problems they miss are to be corrected when I give them back their graded tests the next class, and they are to put them into the back pocket of their notebooks to study for future tests.

Use tape recorder. I encourage students to tape each class so they can go home and listen to discussion of the day again as they review the slideshows.

Prepare for final exam. Study old tests and the final exam study guide. I work each problem on the final guide as we go through the slideshows.

Organize notebook. I have students keep a notebook, divided into sections—schedule, syllabus, slideshows, extra paper and Cartesian planes, homework, calculator page, formula sheet, grade sheet, tests, and final exam study guide (in the back pocket).

Bring a calculator to class. If students have trouble putting a problem into their calculators, I write the step-by-step process in the notebook calculator section.

There is no better feeling than when students succeed and reach their goals. These proven, successful techniques should help your students reach their goals, as well.

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CATCH ME IF YOU CAN: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

So what is all this tweeting, Facebooking, and blogging about? It is about student engagement—active involvement during academic sessions. As faculty and administrators, we can agree that student learning is our goal, and we must do what it takes to engage students while they are members of our learning environments.

So how do we "catch," or engage, the 21st century learner? Studies show that engaging the modern student includes transcending the boundaries of traditional pedagogy, where professors use only chalk and board. We need to meet students on their turf—not compromise academic rigor, but utilize the mediums in the students' environments. Piloting a study at the college, we found that incorporating social media engages students, thus blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are stimulating social environments that work in the classroom.

Our faculty and administrators use social media as conduits for disseminating information regarding financial aid, registration, etc. However, we have discovered that such social media (Twitter, blogs, Facebook, and YouTube) can be effective across academic disciplines. For example, in selected Principles of Accounting courses, Twitter is proving to be an effective means of reminding students about upcoming assignments/tests. Using Twitter in the classroom, the instructor remains in constant communication—even outside of the physical college. And, blogs excite critical thinking and encourage sharing and developing new ideas. In an effort to expand discussion about accounting outside of the classroom, students were asked to respond to the question: "What are your opinions on the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (of 2002) and its negative and positive effects on U.S. businesses?"—the Act passed by Congress requiring companies to clarify the accuracy of their financial information. Students were engaged during this activity with peer-to-peer and instructor-to-peer interaction.

Facebook engages and retains students. Statistical data reveal that 85% of college students have Facebook accounts, and 60% login daily. Although this social network is used primarily for connecting with friends and family, it also serves useful purposes in academic settings. Faculty utilize Facebook to post course announcements or assignments and initiate faculty-student dialogue. Many colleges have developed Facebook pages and use them to connect with students and post pertinent information.

In a recent presentation, college faculty employed this medium to demonstrate its usefulness. Through a page entitled, "Catch Me if You Can: Student Engagement via Social Media," we were able to gather research data on student and faculty engagement. Students and faculty were asked to login and post threads focusing on social media and its effectiveness. Results revealed that students and faculty were engaged, and faculty thought the page was useful in teaching their courses; moreover, participants noted that implementing a Facebook page reinforced consistent effective communication, provided some excitement, and accommodated academic interests.

Faculty utilized YouTube to assign special end-of-the-semester projects. For example, a YouTube project prepared accounting students for public speaking in their respective work environments. Students were charged with developing 30- to 45-minute presentations on budgeting, and the presentations were posted on the college's YouTube channel.

Not all social media will prove successful in all academic areas, but the media we have employed has been useful catalysts to conversation.

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