

Expert Insights

José Antonio Bowen, PhD; Former President, Goucher College; Former Dean, Miami University and Southern Methodist University; Author, Teaching Naked [00:00:00] Now, in America, we want to have more students actually complete college. So that's gonna mean rethinking the system because it isn't just all of a sudden everybody got smarter, and that the population shifted, and now we have, you know, 50 percent instead of 20 percent of people are able to do this work. So if we want people to be able to do these jobs and have these skills, we're probably gonna have to rethink how we teach, what we teach, why we teach. All of those things are going to change. That's the world around us and the economy, our students. So even if our fields have not changed—they have all changed—but even if they hadn't changed and our teaching methods haven't changed, our students and our world, the economy, the reasons people go to college, all of that has changed. And so I think it's reasonable to say, how do I respond to that?

Teresa A. Nance, PhD; Vice President, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Chief Diversity Officer; Associate Professor; Villanova University [00:00:50] Equity means giving what you need in order to accomplish the goals that you, that you have desired. And I think in higher ed, we are coming to understand that better and better. Don't be afraid of diversity, equity, and inclusion. That ultimately it is what sits at the center of the best education. No one comes to us to be the same. Everybody is asking to be better, to know more. And when we think about diversity, equity, and inclusion as we talk about it today, we're really thinking about how we can expand the pool of knowledge and the people who are receiving it. What could be better?

Narrator [00:01:42] Research demonstrates that students start college with different levels of preparation. Some have been primed for college in academia. Some are returning to school after years away, often with family and work responsibilities. And while many have the tools and skills needed to successfully complete your course and meet their academic goals, many will also benefit from a more inclusive approach to teaching and learning. If this is a student's performance curve starting out, what will their performance curve look like at semester's end? Will the two lines overlap, demonstrating a lack of progress in building the skills and knowledge needed to succeed? There are steps you can take to shift the curve so that by semester's end all of your students perform better than where they started and to shrink the curve so that students who benefited from a more inclusive learning environment narrow the gap with their peers.

Sandra McGuire, PhD; Director Emerita, Center for Academic Success; (RET) Professor of Chemistry; Louisiana State University [00:02:35] I think the attitude that there are certain students who are gonna succeed and certain students who are not, and so we need to weed out those students who are not gonna succeed very early on so that they can find someplace else to go or something else to do is very, very misguided. Because even though students come, apparently not having any skills, if we can teach them the things that they need to do . . . And I was very surprised by this, nobody was more surprised than I was to see that you could take a student who was making 20s and 30s in organic chemistry one week, and then three weeks later they're making 80s and 90s just by having it explained to them what the learning process is, because they are very familiar with memorizing and regurgitating, but helping them understand what learning entails and giving them the skills that they need to put learning in place to supplant that memorization regurgitation they're used to doing.

Narrator [00:03:33] It's helpful to identify your students' prior knowledge with polls, surveys, and ungraded quizzes early on to determine what they already know and where there are knowledge gaps or misunderstandings. These data provide insight into the supports needed and adjustments you might make to the course. Do they have the basic technology skills needed to be successful in your course? Do they have the texts and course materials needed? Do they know how much time to dedicate to their coursework? How about where to seek help when facing obstacles, content- or tech-related? Do they know how to engage in discussions using rubrics to inform their work and work productively with their peers? Asking students questions about these skills prompts them to reflect on where they may need additional supports before it's too late. You can use this information to build a student resource bank, including links to videos, explanations, and practice tests in areas where students would benefit from extra guidance. If there are campus-based supports aligned to specific skills they need to master for your course, such as writing or math assistance, it's helpful to ensure your students know about and can take full advantage of those resources.

Sandra McGuire, PhD [00:04:50] I have had faculty tell me that, well, these are adults. They should know that they need to buy the book and read the book. They should know what they need to do. This is their choice. And I say that we could take that attitude. But because of students' prior environment, their prior exposure to strategies that are not what we want them to do, then it really isn't their fault, and it's really not their choice. If you've only been exposed to one set of behaviors, when you get in another environment and you don't even know that there are other behaviors that you could do, it's not really your choice. You're doing the only thing you know to do. And so I think that it's incumbent upon us as faculty to present this information so that students do have choices. I mean, after they get the information, if they decide, no, I don't want to come to class, no, I don't want to buy the book after we've given them all of the evidence, led them through discussions, not just by telling them this is what you need to do, but leading them through discussion questions and activities that demonstrate why these things are important, then I think we can say it's their choice. But until we do that, it really isn't their choice.

Narrator [00:06:07] Whether you are teaching online or face-to-face, you may need to use your data-rich LMS, with robust analytics that can inform you when to take action. Early on and at regular intervals throughout the semester, observe who's logging into the LMS, which pages they're accessing, and even how much time they're spending. Reach out to students who haven't logged in to see if they have questions. Give them an extra nudge by sending words of encouragement. Also, check for high-traffic times so you can plan to make yourself available around the times of day when your students are most engaged.

Dana Autry, PhD, MCHES; Director of Adjunct Faculty Engagement; Academic Affairs Department; Park University [00:06:45] Our learning management system actually has a way to track the number of posts that an individual student has made. It's the grading function within our LMS. This is useful because sometimes you get in the conversation and you're so excited by the content, you're not really noticing which students are participating more and which ones are participating less. So often midweek I'll go into that grading function and I can scroll through each student and see what their responses have been so far. And if I get to the ones that haven't responded at all yet or one brief thing, I have a chance to intervene, reach out to them before the week's over so they still have some time to expand and correct their behavior.

Narrator [00:07:29] In your teaching, be explicit about intended learning outcomes for each day so that students know precisely what you want them to get out of the lesson, and ensure homework and other activities have the same level of difficulty as major assignments and exams so that students are truly prepared to meet your expectations. You can also help students connect their performance with their study habits. Tools like the Semester Performance Prognosis Inventory prompt them to consider the hours they spend studying, the strategies they use to study, their approach to readings, and preparation for quizzes and exams, among other homework routines. By working to identify the behaviors they may need to change themselves, they are more likely to make those adjustments. You may also offer opportunities for them to hear from peer mentors regarding the changes they made to succeed in your course.

Sandra McGuire, PhD [00:08:23] One of the things that I think we as faculty can do to help students understand this difference between what they were doing before they had an unsuccessful exam and what they can do after is something that, different people call it different things, sometimes we'll call it a semester prognosis, I called it a self-test inventory or something like that. But it's just a list of behaviors that if you exhibit those behaviors, you're likely to be successful. So things like, I always preview the material that's going to be covered in class before I go to class. I always review what just happened in class with, as soon as I can after to start information going from short-term to long-term memory. I always correct the problems on past exams or quizzes before the next one. I work with other students in a study group, these kinds of things. And I came up with a list of about 10 or 11 things. And when I give it to students, it's just true/false. I ask them, you know, put true if this is true of you, false if you don't do this. And at the end I tell students, if there are about 11 items, if you do 9 of 11, then you're on the way to an A in this course, 6 to 8, maybe a B, and so forth and so on. And so what it does is it helps students see that, oh, I've only been doing three of these things, so no wonder I'm getting a D in this course. So it helps students to predict what level of performance they're gonna get because they're so, they're tied to the amount of learning that's gonna happen if they do these things.

Narrator [00:10:04] You can also motivate students with video or audio recordings of you reading the assigned text out loud and strategically pausing to emphasize or elaborate on important points. Model your thinking. Clarify concepts that caused confusion among past students. And model ruminating over questions raised in the text. The grading processes you use can offer additional opportunities for more students to succeed. Early grades can act like radar points on a screen, and the more signals that students receive, the more they can plot the best course for success. Sharing sample papers of projects that earned a range of grades provides clear examples of your expectations. An early quiz within the first two weeks provides another coordinate for students to make necessary adjustments before too much time has passed and they start to feel like they can't ever catch up. Also provide multiple opportunities to improve by weighting later exams more than earlier ones, accepting revisions, giving credit for approved extra work, or letting students replace an earlier low grade with a later improved one. Finally, extra support can include optional assignments that help students learn and practice remedial skills to ramp up the skills they need to succeed and video resources of yourself or others that vividly explain complex concepts or how to solve challenging homework problems.

Teresa A. Nance, PhD [00:11:33] And I will add that not only do we want to get our students to the finish line, we want to get them there whole and happy. One of the things we say is that we recruit, we retain, we graduate, and we graduate happy. Happiness is not just "happy haha," but happy knowing that our students had full access to everything our institution has to offer, that they can go on the internships, that they can take study abroad, that they can apply for rigorous graduate programs. And in order to do that, that means that we have to be able to provide them the kind of support they need in order to achieve that. That's what equitable learning is all about.

Narrator [00:12:18] The differences among our students' strengths and areas for growth are an opportunity and academic challenge to plan for. By adopting these practices, we support all learners.