



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

Published by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) • College of Education • The University of Texas at Austin

HOW TO FAVORABLY IMPRESS THE INSTRUCTOR

On the very first day in every course, I share these suggestions for impressing the instructor with my students. I have discovered that not every student “gets it” when it comes to being one! However, I have found that students who understand what these tips mean consider them “heads up” information and smile; others eventually get the hint.

- **Be early.** Arrive at class, and find a seat from which you can see and be seen. Get your equipment (pens, pencils, notebook) out. Quickly review your notes from the last session, and be ready to ask questions if you have any.
- **Greetings.** Smile at the instructor (it makes him/her feel wanted) and at your fellow students (you may need their help).
- **Dress and Demeanor.** Research has demonstrated that neat attire and attitude go a long way.
- **Prepare.** Read the material *before* the lecture. You will find you will need to take fewer notes and be able to listen more carefully (see next). If a tape recording would help, ask permission. Continue to take notes, and remember to listen to the recording as soon as possible after class; listen with your notes at hand. If there is work to be handed in, have it ready. Word processing may help you make fewer errors. Name, class, assignment number or name, and date go in the upper right-hand corner, with multiple pages numbered and stapled, unless instructed otherwise.
- **Read, Read, and Read.** Bookstores and libraries are really lovely places. Find “quick guides,” and go through them within the first two weeks of class. They will give you the context of the material (it all can’t be taught at once). Read purposefully. Try to relate the material to both a personal and global context. Each field has its own dictionary and encyclopedia; find them, and refer to them throughout the course. Read a daily and weekly newspaper and

magazine. Ask the instructor for the names of other texts, journals, and reference books.

- **Write, Write, and Write.** Rewrite your notes so you know what they mean. If there are gaps, ask someone who knows (see next). Make flash cards, and create mnemonic devices for terms and concepts. Work on “hooks.” Draw relationship charts. Keep a journal.
- **Study with Someone Who Cares.** Find people in the class who are really interested in learning. Work with them before, after, and between classes.
- **Coffee, Etc.** Many of us *need* a cup of coffee. Bring a covered mug that is less likely to spill. Be careful with your soda pop, and always remember to recycle. Eating, cleaning out your purse, doing your nails, and doing homework from this or other classes during this one are real turnoffs.
- **Absences.** Avoid them at all costs. If you have been absent, go to the instructor’s office to explain; do not make your explanation in or before class. If there is work or material you missed, try to get it from a classmate. If you cannot, explain that to the instructor.
- **Appear Teachable.** It is amazing how much nicer a teacher can be when you look like and act the role of the student. This does not mean asking any and all questions to get attention. In fact, if you formulate the question and write it down, sometimes it will answer itself, or the teacher will get to it. If not, you can ask it at an appropriate time. You can and should write out the answer you receive.

These suggestions have been well received by my students. I believe, from the behaviors of the majority, that they work.

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SOCIOLOGY INSPIRED BY HISTORY

Fall 1982, I sat in a history class at Prairie View A&M University; the instructor was Dr. George Wolfolk, a man passionate about the study of history. One lecture on the civil rights movement literally drove him to tears. The class was held on Monday nights, 7-10 p.m. I should mention that, as a student, I had a full-time job, ran track, was active in the R.O.T.C., and enrolled in 21 credit hours. Keeping this college student alert and interested was a tough task!

One week we were studying religion, and Dr. Wolfolk invited a Catholic priest to speak to the class. I was almost 20 years old, but had never seen a Catholic priest in person. That night I touched, saw, and believed. I was captured by every word the priest uttered. Every word was new and interesting, and 20 years later this class session is still fresh in my memory.

Inspiring Students

In an effort to inspire my own students, as I had been inspired more than 20 years ago, I turned to the wisdom of my old history professor and incorporated his method into a study of world religions in my class, titling it Religious Seminars. Over the years, I have invited speakers from around our county, representing a variety of religious affiliations, to share their perspectives and experiences with my classes. The most exciting speakers are always invited back, and many have been regular visitors for several years. I observe the reactions of my students to the various speakers, ask students to evaluate each of them, and stay with those in whom I have the most confidence.

Involving Students

At the beginning of each semester, I divide students into groups that ultimately will be responsible for sponsoring at least one speaker, and then each group is assigned a religion at random—literally, by drawing it out of a hat. Students are responsible for contacting the speaker (I identify), making appropriate arrangements, and making useful introductions to the class on the day of the presentation. Ultimately, they feel responsible for the day's activities and take pride in having the day go well. Putting on a seminar of this magnitude takes preparation and skill, and I acknowledge that the mechanics of doing it successfully must be learned and practiced. Therefore, in order to avoid potential disasters and ensure that all bases are covered, I make the initial arrangements with the presenters and share my expectations for the seminar. The students do the rest

and learn how to handle the logistics for making the day special for everyone.

As a class, students pick the speaker's brain for real-life applications of his or her particular religion's tenets, effectively learning about the roles religions and religious beliefs play in today's world. Finally, students are required to write a paper on the religion they were assigned to sponsor.

Conclusion

I challenge instructors to remember what inspired them as students and to put those inspirations to work today. This inspirational method has served my students and me well, and I have used it to develop additional seminars around family, race, class, and gender issues. The instructional applications are enormous and would be useful in other disciplines and formats.

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This issue is the third in this Popular Issues Series. It was originally published in September 2003, as Volume XXV, No. 17.

Suanne D. Roueche, Editor

April 13, 2007, Vol. XXIX, No. 12

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Innovation Abstracts (ISSN 0199-106X) is published weekly following the fall and spring terms of the academic calendar, except Thanksgiving week, by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, 1 University Station, D5600, Austin, Texas 78712-0378, (512) 471-7545, email: abstracts@nisod.org