



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Enhancing Your Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm. Think of the classes and workshops you have taken where the instructor was so excited about being there, where his/her energy for the material and for learning was so strong that the whole class was carried to another level. Remember the courses you have taken where the instructor's enthusiasm was so great that you couldn't help but become involved in the subject matter and in the classroom experience. Perhaps we need to approach stimulating student interest by exploring the enthusiasm we bring to the classroom.

Are there steps we can take to enhance our enthusiasm and thereby create exciting learning experiences for our students? I surveyed the more than 100 full- and part-time faculty members at Santa Fe Community College, where I am an instructor, to find out how they develop their enthusiasm. The survey (43 faculty members responded to the written survey) revealed 10 different approaches which we can utilize to explore and expand the joy and excitement we bring to our courses. I have grouped the 10 approaches (with some of the instructors' comments) into three categories: those approaches that focus on a) the instructor-student relationship, b) the instructor's relationship to the subject matter, and c) the instructor's classroom teaching style.

A. APPROACHES FOCUSING ON THE INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP.

1. **Paying attention to the joy of watching students learn.** Several instructors expressed how excited they felt "witnessing the glow in students' eyes when they realize that they've just learned something important." We can use the joy of watching "when the light bulb clicks on" in a student's mind as a motivation for becoming better teachers. The excitement that students experience as they learn can inspire excitement within ourselves and motivate us to actively seek out new ways of stimulating student learning.
2. **Developing a personal relationship with students.** By getting to know students and by sharing with students, many instructors create a "personal" bond that motivates them in the

classroom. The personal relationship that is developed by having students share their backgrounds with the class, by calling on students by name, and by "working one-on-one with students having trouble," personalizes our experience of teaching. As teachers, we are more stimulated and more excited about teaching when we know the people in our classes.

3. **Appreciating the important role we play in our students' lives.** As teachers, we significantly influence the lives of our students. Simply by our personality and our manner, we positively and/or negatively influence our students' self-images and their feelings about the subject matter and learning. By reminding ourselves of the instructors in our past who helped turn us off to a particular subject and remembering those who helped us open doors in our minds, we are motivated to more positively and effectively present ourselves and the subject matter.

B. APPROACHES FOCUSING ON THE INSTRUCTOR'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE SUBJECT MATTER.

1. **Loving our subject matter.** Several instructors spoke of how their enthusiasm sprang from "falling in love" with their subject matter. Deep feelings for our field of expertise, a keen interest in "new discoveries or ideas," and "excitement" for our professions are strong motivators. By loving what we teach, we more profoundly inspire our students.
2. **Teaching new and/or a variety of courses.** Another technique for enhancing the enthusiasm we bring to the classroom is by "teaching a variety of subjects." For example, by volunteering to teach something we've never taught before, we experience an awareness of the challenges that our students face on a daily basis. Teaching a variety of courses can help us keep that certain edge of vitality, of freshness to our presentations.
3. **Appreciating the importance of what we teach to our students' lives.** We can enhance our enthusiasm by keeping in mind the "critically important" role the subject matter will play in the lives of our students. Whether it is teaching



people basic reading skills necessary for survival in today's world, teaching skills that are vital to running a business, or teaching nursing skills that will be critical to the survival of patients, we can come to class excited about the pivotal role that we and the content we teach can play in our students' lives.

C. APPROACHES FOCUSING ON THE INSTRUCTOR'S CLASSROOM TEACHING STYLE.

1. **Teaching in a way that involves us in the course.** By "walking around the room, getting closer to students," by presenting the material in a way that "requires a response, not just absorption," by continuously adjusting our teaching style based on the responses given by students, we enhance our active involvement in the classroom and thereby enhance our enthusiasm for the teaching experience. The employment of such teaching styles as playing "devil's advocate," going over the homework together with students, sharing the responsibility with students for covering new material, questioning students, and so on, make the classroom a stimulating learning environment for ourselves as teachers.
2. **Making the material real to our students and helping students learn for themselves.** By connecting the "course material, in some way, to an aspect of their (the students) own experience," students and the instructor become more excited about the subject matter. A great deal of enthusiasm is generated by designing our courses to be "hands-on sessions, as close to real life as possible." Several instructors, as well, wrote of the excitement they derived from helping students be responsible for "their own learning," incorporate the material "in their own way," and discover the "answer on their own." We can be invigorated then by helping our students apply the subject matter to their lives and learn for themselves.
3. **Using humor in the classroom.** Humor can be used to enliven the classroom experience, to make it fun. Laughing with students at life and ourselves eases tension, raises the energy of the class, and helps students perceive us as more human and accessible. Humor has the added benefit of making material easier for students to remember.

4. **Challenging ourselves to find the best teaching style for each situation.** We can also generate a great deal of enthusiasm by accepting the challenge of finding the most effective teaching style for each situation. By seeing each class session as "an entirely new experience," we open to a continuously unfolding and exciting discovery process. For each group of students and each particular topic covered, we can actively explore the learning format that will best facilitate student understanding and integration of the material.

This survey of faculty members at Santa Fe Community College revealed a broad diversity of approaches we can use to explore and enhance our enthusiasm. By applying these approaches, we encourage exciting, productive learning experiences for our students. Instructor enthusiasm is a powerful teaching tool. It not only enhances our own experience of teaching; but more important, it stimulates interest in our students.

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