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### Tips for Teaching Non-Traditional Students

More than ever, due to the harsh economic reality and high unemployment rate, more students who were out of school for considerable amounts of time are coming back to upgrade their skills to seek reemployment. Teaching the skills that they need to succeed amid challenges of reality can be a stimulating and thought-provoking experience. Compassion in combination with passion is one of the key factors for those instructing this group of students. A non-traditional student exists in every age group, at every job level, and in every field.

**Get to know your students with passion (enthusiasm):** Getting to know the students and their first names, majors, academic backgrounds, and their future plans and interests are key first steps.

**Compassion (empathy):** Change students' state of mind with a phrase like, "Winning is the state of mind where fortune favors the willing and brave mind."

**Ice breakers:** Listening is a great art. Hearing the concerns and distress that students encounter in their academic work is appreciated by the non-traditional student.

**Expectations:** Ask students to put their class expectations and their goals in writing. This step helps them take a personal audit of their own situations, and it is the key motivational step. Next, have students make a to-do list of their immediate, secondary, and long-term goals.

**College success skills:** Writing techniques, invention, organization, editing, analysis, research, overcoming test anxiety, methods of stress relief, time-management skills, critical reading and writing strategies, testing strategies, and plagiarism are discussed to clarify expectations.

**Reiteration:** Repeat the information at least three times along with writing the information on the board.

**Comfortable learning environment:** Create a supporting learning environment, with optimism in the classroom, to help non-traditional learners focus on learning.

**Clarity:** Lay the ground rules for the assignments and clearly write them on the board, send email messages, and post on shared files folder to assist students in getting the work done in an efficient manner.

**Collaborative learning:** Encourage students to use social networking sites like Facebook to complete group assignments.

**Optimism:** When students have failed in the areas of testing or acquiring important, scientific concepts, give them hope and spend time during office hours to explain where the information can be found. The positive attitude of an instructor can rub off on his/her pupils.

**Encourage student engagement:** Emphasize the importance of the college's Student

Success Center for tutoring and extra help when needed.

Delay in turning in the assignment: Make an effort to know the reason for such delays. Sometimes students have just overlooked the due date or do not have the instructions, source, and guidance to complete the work.

Fine tuning the due date: Life can bring some unpleasant or pleasant surprises. Though most non-traditional learners cope with sudden developments, many get distracted. Giving them an extra day or two can increase the chances of a successful outcome.

Periodic review of teaching methods: At the end of each section, ask for feedback from students, ranging from explaining the specific topic on the board, whom they would like to see as a guest speaker, how effective the guest speaker was, or what was the take-away message from a presentation or lecture.

Periodic review of student progress: When moving from one section to another in the syllabus, provide feedback via email on how well he or she has performed to date.

Work smart: The best tutor is a peer tutor who has done well in the class. Organizing a formal study group with best-performing students is an effective method to improve student performance and learning.

Respecting the teacher's teachers: Non-traditional learners bring the real experience to the class compared to more traditional learners. From their vast experience, it is easy to correlate the basic science and their experience. It is an apt opportunity to learn from the non-traditional learners who can teach the teacher regarding what is not in the text book or lab manual.

Class-preparation assignment: Let students know about the lesson plan for the next class. Require them to read the summary of the topic and prepare a few pertinent questions during the lecture.

Student support services: Identify any issues and direct students to the right source. This may be time-consuming, but it is worth the time investment.

Keep things practical: Students learn better by understanding the purpose of the lesson. Real-life examples are very helpful and students connect the lesson to life easily.

Happy endings: With the implementation of methods discussed in this article, student retention is a considerable success story—an aim of all serious educators.

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