

“THE BEST OF THE CASSL DISCUSSION GROUP 06-08

Sample email strings from the CRC CASSL Discussion Group

The CASSL Discussion Group is an ongoing dialogue involving nearly 100 CRC faculty, staff, and managers. The email strings below represent some of the more interesting conversations of the past couple of years arranged by topic and date. Note: header and/or signature information has been deleted from the emails in the strings.

Definition of a “Community of Scholars” – Feb 08

At a recent CASSL Discussion we talked about the culture of scholarship. Near the end of the discussion we asked ourselves how we would explain to our students what we meant by a “community of scholars”. See below for our rough draft ideas...

Dear students,

CRC is a community of scholars; this means that...

- o We seek personal growth through thinking, discussing, observing, listening, questioning, and developing self awareness...
- o We appreciate what it is that we know and understand, but also come to recognize that there is a great deal that we don't yet know.
- o We are engaging ideas, making connections, and expressing creativity.

What do you think? Edit away!

Dear students,

CRC is a community of scholars; this means that...

- o We seek personal growth through thinking, discussing, observing, listening, questioning, actualizing, and developing self awareness...
- o We appreciate what ~~it is that~~ we know and understand, but we also come to recognize that there is a great deal that we don't yet know.
- We are engaging ideas, making connections, and expressing creativity.
- We embrace open discussion and debate in our attempt to understand and respect ideas different from our own

Dear Colleagues -

Now that we have talked about what it means to **be** a community of scholars, here is your chance to join **in** a community of scholars! **Perceptions: A Reading & Discussion Group** will discuss the emergence of the Communist Party in 20th century China on Thursday, February 28 from 3:00-4:30pm in the SOC Conference Room.

Ann Rothschild, who has recently returned from a visit to China, will be leading the conversation.

Late arrivals and early departures are welcome! If you, or your students, are interested in attending this talk, please respond to this email.

I look forward to learning with you!

The timing on this discussion is very interesting. I'm teaching ENGWR 300, and had decided to begin the semester with readings on education to help students to develop a sense of scholarship principles, academic discourse, and such that will inform our work throughout the course.

I'm teaching out of Michael Austin's *Reading the World: Ideas That Matter*. We began with the following readings in my class discussion:

Al-Ghazālī, *Manners to be Observed by Teachers and Students*, pp 463-468

Plato, *Allegory of the Cave*, pp 447-453

Jean-Jacques Rousseau *from Emile, or On Education, pp 479-489* An additional reading from Paulo Freire's essay on the Banking Method of Education was offered for extra credit.

Discussing these readings (and looking, too, to a number of other very interesting essays from this chapter of the text) brought up a number of very interesting ideas on the topic:

- 1) All three of the writers seemed to agree that a good academic environment involved a significant degree of discomfort--disorientation, awkwardness, struggle, and such seem to be intrinsic to the discourse
 - 2) Rousseau makes a very interesting distinction between what he describes as "public" learning and "private" learning--in his essay, the distinction is between learning we need in order to work better in a community vs. that we need in order to meet our own individual needs. He argues that Plato's Republic is definitive on public learning, but that the best learning process will effectively integrate both forms of learning.
 - 3) There are a number of important --I think of them as "tensions" or balancing issues--that characterize academic discourse. These include: Individual v.s group needs, student needs vs. teacher needs, understanding vs. expression, familiar vs. unfamiliar, conformity vs. innovation, complexity vs. simplicity, generalization v.s specificity, etc.
- I appreciate that the list we have come up with seems to address all these issues at some level or another.

Unequal access to economic mobility – Feb 08

http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2007/11_blackwhite_isaacs.aspx

The link above goes to the executive summary of a report from the Brookings Institution showing that race matters in terms of improving economic status from generation to generation. An excerpt is shown below: **Economic Mobility of Black and White Families** Economic Mobility, Children & Families Julia B. Isaacs, Child and Family Policy Fellow, Economic Studies Economic Mobility Project, This report, by Julia Isaacs of The Brookings Institution, reviews overall income trends based on Census Bureau data and provides an intergenerational analysis based on a longitudinal data set that allows a direct match of the family income of parents in the late 1960s to their children's family income in the late 1990s to early 2000s.¹ In brief, trends show that median family incomes have risen for both black and white families, but less so for black families. Moreover, the intergenerational analysis reveals a significant difference in the extent to which parents are able to pass their economic advantages onto their children. Whereas children of white middle-income parents tend to exceed their parents in income, a majority of black children of middle-income parents fall below their parents in income and economic status. These findings are provided in more detail below.

The link below goes to a related page from National Public Radio where you can find a podcast and blog about this subject.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18576278>

Question: What are we doing as a college that may help reverse this disturbing trend?

This report legitimizes our efforts as a college to incorporate cultural competence in our teaching and the importance of programs like Diop Scholars. Economic mobility is directly correlated to education. Our efforts to educate all students are important, however, because community college is the gateway for many students of diverse backgrounds we must make a concerted effort to provide education opportunities that support students who are underrepresented and underserved.

This is not to say that economic mobility is the sole reason behind education. Education offers our students options to explore worlds and options that may have previously been unopened. This report makes similar observations to a report released by the Pew Research Center: Optimism about Black Progress Declines: Blacks see Growing Values Gap Between Poor and Middle Class(<http://pewsocialtrends.org/assets/pdf/Race.pdf>)

.Political pundit Juan Williams has commented on this report extensively on NPR.

We have reversed this disturbing trend in our family by having two children who have chosen the performing arts for their careers. If you wish to do this you will find that they will load up on 1099's and wind up paying self employment tax on their working poor incomes. They will have perfect driving records because they won't be able to afford cars. They will spend their money paying back student loans and their health insurance premiums. They will live with friends, network everyday and work like crazy when the opportunity arises. They will also have accolades and honors if they perform well, and these intrinsic rewards will motivate them to hang in there, happy as clams with proud parents to boot.

Did you really want the children of white families to achieve less economically than their parents?

The Myth of First-Year Enlightenment Feb 08

<http://chronicle.com/temp/email2.php?id=yJBtYjc2tfQwBnttgw2qDmRjQK3mVZGk>

This link goes to an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education that reviews a new book about the intellectual lives of college freshmen. Follow the link soon as access for folks who don't subscribe to the Chronicle will only be available for a few days. The book is by Tim Clydesdale: *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens After High School* (University of Chicago Press, 2007). Excerpts from the review: Clydesdale interviewed a large sample of teenagers during their senior year at New Jersey High School, and then interviewed them again -- asking questions about their identities, values, religious and political views, and more -- at the end of their first year of college. (He supplemented his interviews at his primary field site with dozens more interviews at different high schools and colleges.) He hoped to discover the extent to which freshman year affected students....

"Most of the mainstream American teens I spoke with neither liberated themselves intellectually nor broadened themselves socially during their first year out," he writes. "What teens actually focus on during the first year out is this: daily life management."

In other words, freshmen spend most of their time and intellectual energy figuring out how to handle life without parental restraints and support: how to deal with money (or lack thereof); negotiate newfound freedoms with sex, drugs, and alcohol; and determine how much time to devote to studying, working, and playing. But what freshmen don't do during their first year of college comes as more of a (perhaps depressing) surprise: "Most American teens keep core identities in an 'identity lockbox' during their first year out and actively resist efforts to examine their self-understandings through classes or to engage their humanity through institutional efforts such as public lectures, the arts, or social activism."

Put more succinctly: "Contemporary teens are practical men and women. They . . . manage their daily lives fairly well. But they are not, by and large, thinking men and women."

I suspect that this would not surprise Maslow.

This is very interesting! In some ways, not very surprising. I wonder how different the results would be if he were to follow-up again, say at the end of two years (or at the baccalaureate degree-granting schools, after four). I think that first year is spent in just plain adjusting.

It has been my experience that most people that display the curiosity of the greater meaning of life do so long before college. Also, with more and more people attending college to be able to find jobs that will earn them more than minimum wage, not all students are seeking enlightenment, just a decent paycheck.

What you describe has been looked at in Anthropology since the 1930's. Sometimes referred to as cultural neoteny, it looks at how societies deliberately delay allowing members to become adults past the time of physical adulthood. There were a number of hypotheses proposed as to why this would happen, but most seemed to center on the level of technology and the increased amount of time necessary to learn how to become a functioning adult. What is interesting to me about all this is that as the age of social adulthood has been increasing, the age at which the physical adulthood process starts has been decreasing. So teachers have to do with students who are restricted in their social identity, but have had a longtime awareness of their physical selves....AND we want them to sit still and take notes. HmMMM.

You're right; many students are seeking a decent paycheck, rather than "enlightenment". The irony is that, these days, "enlightenment" is (almost without exception) the necessary means to that decent paycheck. As it is often put, "Thinking is the most valuable skill in a post-industrial economy..."

Consider the example of Philosophy; surely the quintessential discipline representing the alleged divergence of "enlightenment" and "paycheck". The New York Times article "Philosophers Find the Degree Pays off in Life and in Work" reports that "philosophy majors are increasingly successful in the world in which business and government depend more and more on abstract reasoning abilities." At Techforce 2000, a meeting of our region's high-tech employers and educators, local employers emphasized the importance in their hiring decisions of applicants' abstract reasoning skills, citing the rate at which specific technical training becomes outdated, while abstract reasoning skills retain their value. The New York Times Career Planner reports that "Philosophy is one fundamental area of study that has found a new role in the high-tech world". Our students would do well to understand that the "unenlightened" are easily replaced domestically and, in many cases, with increasing frequency, more cheaply replaced by workers overseas.

Learning Math – March 08

http://www.insidehighered.com/views/blogs/confessions_of_a_community_college_dean/liveblogging_the_league_iii_stems_and_roots

The above link goes to an article about issues surrounding math education...the comments are perhaps more interesting than the article, by the way. Check it out.

Excerpt: It's a tricky issue, since the roots run deep. Obviously, there's a major national failing in the way math and science are taught in high schools and earlier. Certainly, we need to take good hard looks at how we remediate math, and how we teach those intro level classes. (And when did 'college algebra' come to exist? I thought algebra was a high school course.) But that said, there's still something discomfiting about knowing that arguments based on a need for more STEM grads often wind up supporting the creation of more English majors. Even outside of STEM majors, one of the major drivers of attrition is the inability to pass the required gen ed math classes. Since even English and Art majors have to take at least *some* math, an unsuccessful early math sequence has consequences across the curriculum.

Just as a corollary to this discussion, there was a wonderful article in this week's "New Yorker" about the way the brain processes numbers and where in the brain this happens. I believe the article was titled Numbers Man and the author was Jim _____. I was so taken with it that I photocopied it for a couple of friends. If you can manage to get a hold of it, it is a fresh and optimistic look at how to teach math and why based on neuroscience.

My wife and I will be running a Math/Science camp for kids in Belize this summer, so I find many of your comments fascinating and the article in the New Yorker intriguing. With regards to teaching mathematics before college however, I think some comments indicate that people may be unaware of what is actually being taught K-12. Algebra is NOT introduced in high school, but in fact both algebra and geometry are introduced in

second grade and students are doing simple equations by fifth grade. I know this because that is what my wife teaches, and she does it well. Elementary school children are taught problem solving, relationships, unknowns and formulas starting in second grade as part of the mandated California curriculum. How well it is taught or rather how well it is learned is certainly a problem. Blaming previous teaching for our students' attitudes towards math ignores a whole raft of other social issues that are more likely at fault. We should NOT pander to lower standards, but perhaps we need to set higher standards for our teaching before we set higher standards for our students' learning. I love mathematics, but I only learned to love it after I got involved with computer science and I saw how creative one can be through using math. In all of my mathematics classes from high school through graduate school, I only had one teacher who showed a love of mathematics, who let his students experience the passion of numbers. All of my computer science profs exuded passion. Maybe it is a trait of mathematicians to be taciturn and computer geeks to be fun...I do not know. My brother teaches biological mathematics at Emory University in Atlanta. Part of his students' assignments include watching the TV show "Numbers"...and analyzing it. Just some thoughts.

First, let me say that this is a discussion that has been ongoing for quite some time and any solution proposed is likely not an original one. That being said, it seems that we need to stand mathematics education on its head and shake out the old ideas that are still failing our students. We, the mathematics educators, have spent years placing band aids (sorry for the brand naming) on problems that bleed through eventually.

When I tell someone I am a mathematician, they almost always say something like, "Oh, I've always been bad at math." My response is usually, "As long as you think so, you will be." The running, and sad, joke is that most people are very willing to claim they are bad at math and that they can't even balance a check book. It's almost a cynical badge of honor in society. It's not likely to happen that those same individuals, when speaking with an English professor, will claim they can't even read a comic book.

One problem is that the general public views mathematics as a constant pushing around and manipulation of numbers and mystical letters. In fact, most people consider arithmetic to BE mathematics. The unfortunate circumstance is that these misinterpretations have led to an increasing feeling that math courses are "gatekeeper" courses instead of what they truly are - courses meant to increase an individual's ability to think critically and problem solve (with or without the use of numbers).

To this end, there has been a gradual "dumbing down" of mathematics for years and authors/publishers are propagating this demise of math education into an elementary understanding of complex mathematical topics that would otherwise have been deeply covered in the past. We dabble in mathematical topics without getting our hands dirty and we expect our students to understand what math is.

We must start asking challenging questions:

Since when has algebra been an 18 month sequence (prealgebra, elementary algebra, intermediate algebra)? Why does 50% to 60% of each course seem like a repeat of the last course? (This is not true for the calculus series or trigonometry, but is painfully true with the subjects that most of our student population fail.) Should we pander and lower standards because everyone else (clients) want us to (can you tell my answer to this?)?

Are we doing the students a disservice by following the curriculum that is failing U.S. college students across the country? Do we cover too many topics with too little detail in each of our courses? This happens to be one of the new initiatives put forth by the American Mathematics Association of Two Year College's "Beyond Crossroads" workshops.

That's just my two cents,

Generation Y and Narcissistic Attitudes - Rough Seas Ahead Feb 07

The article below about research to be released today is very troubling. It really brings forward something I've been thinking about since I got into teaching. I think this might be a "teachable moment" for our students if we approach it that way.

I normally don't get too excited over "science by press conference", but this so fits what I experience as a relatively new teacher that I think it is worth considering.

A new report suggests that an overdose of self-esteem in college students could mean a rough road ahead. By Larry Gordon and Louis Sahagun LA Times Staff Writers February 27, 2007

No wonder YouTube is so popular. All the effort to boost children's self-esteem may have backfired and produced a generation of college students who are more narcissistic than their Gen X predecessors, according to a new study led by a San Diego State University psychologist. And the Internet, with all its MySpace and YouTube braggadocio, is letting that self-regard blossom even more, said the analysis, titled "Egos Inflating Over Time."

In the study being released today, researchers warn that a rising ego rush could cause personal and social problems for the Millennial Generation, also called Gen Y. People with an inflated sense of self tend to have less interest in emotionally intimate bonds and can lash out when rejected or insulted. "That makes me very, very worried," said Jean Twenge, a San Diego State associate professor and lead author of the report. "I'm concerned we are heading to a society where people are going to treat each other badly, either on the street or in relationships." She and four other researchers from the University of Michigan, University of Georgia and University of South Alabama looked at the results of psychological surveys taken by more than 16,000 college students across the country over more than 25 years.

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory asks students to react to such statements as: "If I ruled the world, it would be a better place," "I think I am a special person" and "I like to be the center of attention."

The study found that almost two-thirds of recent college students had narcissism scores that were above the average 1982 score. Thirty percent more college students showed elevated narcissism in 2006 than in 1982. Twenge said she and her coauthors are not suggesting that more students today have a pathological narcissistic personality disorder that needs psychiatric treatment. Still, traits of narcissism have increased by moderate but significant amounts, said Twenge, who last year published a book titled "Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled — and More Miserable Than Ever Before." The narcissism report is under review for publication in a scholarly journal, which would give it the stamp of academic recognition it now lacks. It was released, Twenge said, in connection with the upcoming paperback edition of her book and with a student affairs workshop today at the University of San Diego at which she and another speaker will discuss how today's college students approach education.

Some of the increase in narcissistic attitudes was probably caused by the self-esteem programs that many elementary schools adopted 20 years ago, the study suggests. It notes that nursery schools began to have children sing songs that proclaim: "I am special, I am special. Look at me." Those youngsters are now adolescents obsessed with websites, such as MySpace and YouTube, that "permit self-promotion far beyond that allowed by traditional media," the report says.

Other trends in American culture, including permissive parenting, increased materialism and the fascination with celebrities and reality TV shows, may also heighten self-regard, said study coauthor W. Keith Campbell, psychology professor at the University of Georgia. "It's part of a whole cultural system," he said. The researchers seek to counter theories that current college students are more civic-minded and involved in volunteer activities than their predecessors. Because many high schools require

community work, increases in volunteering "may not indicate a return to civic orientation but may instead be the means toward the more self-focused goal of educational attainment," the report says.

An annual survey of U.S. college freshmen by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA has found growing interest in public service and social responsibility, presumably in response to Hurricane Katrina and other disasters around the world. But that survey also showed that current freshmen are much more interested in financial success and less in "a meaningful philosophy of life" than students were in the 1970s. At Cal State Long Beach on Monday, an informal survey produced divided opinions about Gen Y personality traits. Students and teachers said they often see examples of inflated egos on campus: students who converse in the computer center while others are trying to concentrate, preen in front of the reflecting windows of the economics building or expect good grades simply for showing up at class. Laura Rantala, 26, a sociology major, said the phenomenon got in the way of a survey she conducted last semester on the attitudes of men and women about jury duty. "It took about three minutes to complete the survey," she recalled. "But many students were so self-absorbed they didn't want to participate. "I think it's because we all have our own cellphone and iPod with which we're doing our own thing in our own little world," she mused. Some students seeking degrees in finance and management said, however, that they had good reason to stress confidence and esteem. James Coari, a lecturer in the College of Business Administration, agreed, to a point. In an interview in his office, Coari said, people looking for jobs "have to be concerned about image because competition is fierce."

Marc Flacks, an assistant professor of sociology, said that he believed that narcissism was too harsh a description for current students and that it was more important to discuss why "we have a society in which narcissistic behavior is a good quality to have." This is a bottom-line society, so students are smart to seek the most direct route to the bottom line," he added. "If you don't have a me-first attitude, you won't succeed." Flacks summed up the attitudes he often encounters in students, who expect a tangible payoff from their education: The old model was a collegial one in which students and professors alike sought knowledge for knowledge's sake. The new model is 'I paid my money, give me my grade and degree.' It makes me want to ask [students], 'Want fries with that order?' "

I am troubled especially by the last 3 paragraphs of the initial report as they do seem to align with a surge in attitude apparent in our students. Appearance in a class is increasingly interpreted as an "A" by the student, just as the fact that an assignment exists regardless of form should merit a high grade. It seems we educators are not getting through to them early enough about the satisfaction in the angst of education and that effort is commensurate to gain. I am saddened by the earlier and earlier loss of passion in our students.

Dr. Twenge, the author of Generation Me, was the keynote speaker at the CA State Academic Senate Teaching Institute a few weeks ago. Here is a link to her presentation with lots of data and graphs:

<http://www.asccc.org/Events/Teaching/2007/GenerationMe.ppt>

It was a most interesting talk, and I'd be interested in reading the book now. I'm not sure what the solution is, but it would be a good one to figure out. Basically, how to revert culturally to thinking of the needs of others, or putting others first!

I too find this to be disturbing and depressing, because this confirms what I have been seeing not only in my classroom, but in many areas of society--restaurants, highways, buses and light rail, sidewalks, television, internet, career and salary expectations, and election days (low voter turnout). I am hopeful that this too shall pass--the pendulum frequently swings. However, I am not confident that a swing will occur during my teaching career. Therefore, I fear the beginning of every semester will remain a challenge, as students push and pull to see what rules can be twisted and bent in each classroom.

Perhaps our collective pains and angst could be reduced by faculty and staff having and holding fair expectations, with defined consequences. It would be unrealistic for expectations and consequences to be identical across a diverse college campus. Would an important discussion be what is "fair?" How does one hold realistic standards, implement defined consequences, yet be open to the needs of individual students, without feeding the narcissistic "me?"

I too find this an interesting topic and have been struggling with how to work with this group of students. I like Margaret's analogy to the "work world" and use this in my classes. I find that in spite of giving explicit directions on how to do something, many of the students do not follow or even look at them. When I return their work with a low score and they complain, I ask them how an employer would deal with an employee who did not follow directions. I explain that part of their education in my class is learning how to follow directions. I talk about why in the sciences they need to be able to follow directions to be successful in laboratory classes. And I talk about needing to be able to follow directions in life. Most of them accept this and modify their behavior, but not all. I too have students who come to class daily, do little or no homework or quizzes, fail their exams with abysmally low scores, and yet expect to pass the course. I have to take time to talk with them about their expectations, and often relate it to work and life. It seem like I am spending more and more time teaching students about how to be successful in life rather than successful in chemistry. Yes, the two go hand in hand, but years ago I simply had to teach them about being successful in chemistry.

Well Said I teach Sociology and I too have similar experiences. Just recently I returned papers back with zeros on them because I had taken the time to warn all of my sections repeatedly about how the format of the papers needed to look in order for them to be accepted. After all the warnings, there was still a significant number of papers that done in accordance with the standards I had set in the syllabus (which were only "the paper must be typed, double spaced, and stapled"). They still felt the need to turn in a page here, or a page and a half there. How many times must it be said that if you do not follow all of the directions, you will get none of the credit?!! As I returned papers back with scores (for those who followed directions) and zeros (for those who did not) I saw the looks of disappointment and anger, but I couldn't help feeling that they were more directed at me than, themselves. This made me frustrated, and that when I explained to the students that success in college dependent upon work ethics, and began using similar ideologies that many of you are using. I am now hopeful, and dare I say faithful, that the students will get the message. College is and should be viewed as work; the same kind of commitment, diligence, and excellence that it takes to maintain a job, and bring in money is the same kind that results in passing classes, which ultimately leads to graduation, which constitutes college success. Hopefully the will see that the benefits of having strong work ethics in college is twofold: They get paid in the form of a letter grade. And it surely pays off later in benefits that they'd never dream of. :)

Talkin 'bout Their Generation – October 07

<http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2007/10/23/cowie>

For a view of students who are definitely not the same as ours (upperclass kids from an elite school) go to the attached link. Suggests to me a widening culture gap between the upper class and the rest of us.

An excerpt:

Turns out that for my elite students — en route to becoming sharp suits and clever corporate cogs — rock and roll is simply one more element in the finishing process of becoming just like the folks. Roll over Bob Dylan and tell Norman Rockwell the news. Jack Black's character in School of Rock had to teach his anxious and repressed grade schoolers what he knew viscerally: that the purpose of rock and roll is "Sticking it to The Man." Given that most of my students want to become "the man" (in whatever gender the icon of power might come in today), it's certainly not about sticking it to 'em.

Dear Colleagues,

As a proud dad to a son who attends what some would consider an "elite" school, and as a teacher and social scientist who continues to study the influences of information technology on world cultures, I find it not at all surprising that our nation's future leaders are forming their identities close to those of their families and in line with mainstream societal norms. The oft uncontrolled--neither by critical thinking nor information technology, in that order--spread of information has created, perpetuated and seemingly justified so many "revolutions" that those who will be our nation's leaders are, albeit in their own individual ways, turning to what should unite and stabilize the current chaos that is our country. The music of their parents is just one of those uniting forces since our young people no longer consider it revolutionary but, rather, nostalgic.

We need to give due credit our future leaders because they are still standing up against "The Man". But "The Man" has changed: Students as a group pay much less attention to our current government leaders than they do to media outlets and personalities which have been increasingly allowed to portray unconventional values as "normal" and thereby perpetuate the aforementioned chaos. The students who study at elite institutions have seen too many "revolutionaries" get away with too many actions that are not intended to benefit society as a whole, and they are certainly smart enough to know that selfishness cannot be good for a healthy democracy in the long run. Yes, they are not standing up as publicly as their parents, but you might want to create a Facebook account for yourself and look around. You will be surprised...

Two observations and thanks for supplying us with food for thought.

1. I have always been amazed that my children know all the words to any of the Beatles' tunes.
2. When I read this, I recalled the huge strike I witnessed in Milan, Italy about two weeks ago in which people, many age 23-30 or so were engaged in active protest against "squalor" and "poor working opportunities." This took place at the piazza in front of the Duomo, probably 3000 there. I immediately was taken back to the 70's when I was attending college, and we were protesting the war in Vietnam complete with police marching on campus shooting canisters of tear gas, and students actively doing whatever it took to shut down the university. Looking back, I couldn't think of a time since then that students felt strongly enough about something that they would raise their voices in protest with such a sense of emotion and conviction. In Italy, when shots were fired at the demonstration, no one seemed to run, but banded together in solidarity and climbed higher up the statuary and fountain, voices angrier. Technology has dissipated that type of energy into late night blogging with a cup of coffee. I wonder if there is any social issue which would cause our students to strike.

Students dropping classes – May 07

I have noted a distressing trend this semester...my "drop" rates seem to be much higher than usual. I'm referring to both those students who drop the class part way through and those students who remain on the roll but come to very few classes and at the very end. I don't think that my teaching methods have changed so as to increase the difficulty of the classes, but there are fewer students in class now than is normal at the end of the semester. Have any of you noted this trend?

Hi all- Unfortunately, too many students drop courses far too often and this results in unexpected consequences including ineligibility for federal financial aid, progress probation, and, not to mention the costs involved to the individual student and the state. The questions continue: Are students dropping due to poor academic preparation, too many units, or is it due to conditions that they believe are out of their control (employment, family, etc.), or a combination of reasons. I hear from students when they come in for discipline or when their financial aid is denied. Most declare that they had no idea the impact of dropping classes, believe that a "W" is non-punitive, and don't take into account the impact of their decision on themselves or others.

The greater concern for me is the often casualness in which students frequently drop classes or stop participating with no sense of accountability. I'm concerned about how this behavior will become a common practice in other parts of their lives.

These are important thoughts, particularly those related to setting poor patterns of behavior for the future. This issue of "casualness" might have an important implication for counseling, freshman seminar, etc. It will be important to get a sense from other faculty members about whether they are seeing these same increasing patterns of dropping. It might have important implications for how we prepare for new incoming students this

I think that bothandmake good points. I am seeing end of semester attrition. I'm also constantly amazed at the number of students who just "stop." I wish it were limited to younger students -- but it seems to run across the board. With the changes in financial aid requirements, I was seeing more students persisting and getting "F's." Now they just stop coming. It certainly opens the door for some interesting research questions. With some of the other commentaries that have been occurring this semester, it would appear that we are encountering some basic behavioral changes in our students. Now would be a good time to start asking these questions. I think the Ed Initiative/Freshman Seminar experience gave us a good start and I'd like to see it expanded.

Dear Colleagues -

This is an interesting conversation to me. Thanks for initiating it, Marybeth.

The way I see it there are two distinct phenomena at work here. First, students who formally "drop" class late in the semester do so because they realize they don't have the skills necessary to pass the class. Of course there is always the job change or ill relative for some students, but most of the late semester drops occur because of the lack of pre-requisites in content courses. They think they can do it -- perhaps the counselor told them they could do it -- and so they enroll in courses for which they are NOT prepared. After the midterm exam or research paper, they realize that they can't succeed and so they drop.

The second issue is, in some ways, more insidious than the first. The second way in which students "drop" is by simply disappearing. Their name is still on the roster but they no longer warm a seat in the classroom. This is the casual culture to which Celia refers. Coming and going is their reality. It's the way young people today date each other, treat their employment prospects, and it's the way they view their education. They can take it, and sometimes they can -- and do -- leave it. Sometimes they will disappear for several class sessions, only to reappear one day in class like nothing happened. Usually they bring in a sheepish smile when I ask them where they've been. Sometimes they have been out of state. Sometimes they just slept in too late too many times. There is no sense of urgency or accountability because CRC will always be here when they decide to focus on education. School is one of many, many, many options in their lives. The perceived benefits from education are low, hence the low appreciation for discipline and personal application to achieve a goal. Frequently, they have no goal.

Many young people can't make up their minds because there are too many options. Should they party (which they know very well and which is quite appealing); should they work (which they think will get them some clothes and a latte and seems to be appropriate if they are not in school); or should they go to school (which they have some vague notion seems to be the most correct attitude but the least palatable action)? If they choose the latter, there is still the question of what major to focus on and what career to aspire toward. Some students have told me they feel paralyzed to choose a major for fear of selecting the wrong one. So, they default to no major. This leads them down the long path to goal-less-ness. If there is no goal, why work so hard? Hence, low levels of discipline and low desires to apply oneself.

My perspective on this is informed not only by being college faculty but by the three young adults in my life who call me "mom." As the parent of three twenty-something (step) children, I see the casualness of their lives firsthand. Celia voices her concern that American youth's casual behavior may become common practice in other aspects of their lives. I would suggest that this casual behavior is their life. Welcome to their world. Sorry for being so long winded. Did I mention that this topic is interesting to me? :)

There have been so many wonderful, insightful comments. Based upon my limited sample of 84 students this semester in BIOL 310 (science lab course for non-majors), "only" 11% have withdrawn, compared to 25% in Fall 2005. And, attendance in lab and lecture has been good, except for Friday lectures, which always seems to be an attendance issue.

However, I have growing concerns about my BIOL 410 (science lab course for majors), where withdrawals have been creeping upwards, and is now at 21%--compared to 11% in Fall 2006. In years of teaching science majors and non-majors, I have never had a withdrawal rate in any majors class so high, especially compared to non-majors. Is this an indication of increasing under-preparedness of our science majors? Or perhaps that the time and energy demands of science labs are increasingly in conflict with employment and/or family needs? Most likely, it is a combination of these and other factors as others have indicated. In any case, these withdrawals in my science majors course are giving me many concerns.

Hello all. I am sorry for not chiming in on any of the previous conversations. I am "alive and well" and still working here, and I do enjoy reading my colleagues' perspectives on various issues. This topic, wow, really prompts me to share an incident that happened today which speaks to low or no accountability, attrition (disappearing acts) and casualness (well, since we are being honest, can I say a touch of "laziness" and the most cavalier attitudes I have ever witnessed?).

Scenario: Research paper due today (red flags going up)

Time: 2:00pm (which is supposed to mean class BEGINS at 2:00pm, right?)

Attendance: 7 students ON TIME (only about 16 still enrolled from the original 29, most are/were "disappearing acts")

Since I knew that students would attempt to show up late, I posted a sign outside the door, stating that the class began at 2pm, that it is now 2:10pm, the research paper is officially "late," and to please wait until their classmate completes his/her presentation before entering (to avoid disruption--students are typically nervous enough without the added stress of casual students shuffling in during presentations).

Two students obeyed and waited until the first presenter was done, then I opened the door, letting them know it was ok to come in--they understood and apologized for being late.

Here's the kicker: After the second student presented, I checked outside again, and on my note, a student wrote, "So What." So what! Be courteous to your classmates, so what? Your paper is late, so what? YOU are late, so what? You could very well fail the course, so what?

Accountability? Casualness? I used to feel terrible frustration; now I am kind of hurting for students because . . . I don't know . . . I'm just hurting for them because they just do not get "it," whatever "it" represents.

Teaching in the study abroad program certainly gives you a different perspective on this and a different way to influence students. Students paid \$9000.00 to go live in Florence for a semester and take 12 units. The five faculty there agreed at the beginning that we would not tolerate unexcused absences. We agreed that students who missed classes because of illness had to bring a doctor's note verifying it. Students who had more than three unexcused absences in any class were subject to being sent home...with no refund. They signed a contract to that effect at the beginning of the semester. We sent no students home. I sent students out of class because they were too sick to be there. They wanted to be in Italy, so they went to class. As Maureen wrote, they needed a goal. Perhaps our students need to understand the immediate rewards they get out of not dropping classes as well as the long term benefits. That seems to me to be something that we (faculty and counseling staff) need to do for our students every semester. In Italy we contacted every absent student the day they missed a class to find out why they weren't there. Perhaps we could do the same in Sacramento. If on the first day of classes, we made sure that we had correct contact info (email address and phone number), we could follow up with missing students as they missed. I was amazed in Italy to hear students say again and again "I

did not know you cared." I am not saying this is an end-all solution, and I certainly realize that we teachers have enough to do, but a lot of this could be somewhat automated, with pre-done sentences that you could paste into email. It is just more food for thought, about how to give some students a short-term goal of: making your professor happy or responding to care and concern or getting the nag off your back.

Hi Colleagues,

This thread is very interesting, and, once I read Maureen's email, I knew I had to respond.

Regarding her second perspective (casual behavior, too many choices), I am largely in agreement, as my experiences which inform my views are very similar (also a step parent to 3 twenty-somethings). I would like to offer an additional explanation for this. Could it be that these students are making a rational choice based on their perception of value? Social life, work (or at least income), family relationships and education are, to varying degrees and combinations, the main issues in most of our students' lives. For reasons demonstrated by Maureen, the perceived benefits of attending courses are not often focused, and certainly not immediate (that was also true for me as a community college student - I have more than a few "W"s on my 10 year-long community college transcript).

I, too, am troubled by the high percentage of non-completers (closer to 25% 30% in Automotive, BTW). I know this is a heretical to some of you, but, I wonder if the rate of course completion would be higher if the financial cost to attend were higher? I suspect that the answer would be yes, and I know that would also result in lower initial enrollments. But perhaps the students who did enroll would be more motivated to succeed (complete)?

What I take from Maureen, and others who have contributed to this topic, is that maybe California's community college is a bit too accessible? Judging by the out of pocket expenses to go to college (about \$200 for fees and books for a typical 3-unit course), would students appreciate the experience better if they paid more for it? This should also be accompanied by a greater usage and availability of financial aid, as I recognize that there are motivated students who lack adequate means.

I'm just throwing this out there, because, like it or not, I think it does explain at least part of the problem. I like the accessibility of community college, and, with fees structured the way they are, I think we'll need to focus on helping those who demonstrate the will to succeed. Those are the students who show up for classes, schedule appointments around their school schedule, do the reading and homework, and ask questions in lecture (Yes, I make those expectations abundantly clear in my courses).

I enjoy being a "learning facilitator" , and I want to show those who want to learn how to learn. We can't ultimately be responsible for students' choices. They are free to fail or withdraw, and they can come back later when their life circumstances change or when they become sufficiently motivated to succeed.

I hope this doesn't come across as a rant from an uncaring instructor. I do care deeply for my students, and I want them to succeed. But I can only do so much, and I should only do so much, so I can still be an effective facilitator for those who are prepared to learn.

This is such an interesting topic. I see a lot of withdrawals and disappearances, but most of my CIS classes are electives, not part of the GE requirements, so I try to chalk it up to that. I have seen an increase in students not showing up, then showing up for the final to get an F, but at least show participation (I suspect financial aid motives). Like Drew, I wonder if we should change the stakes for dropping, but I consider perhaps just stricter rules could be enforced sooner in the semester.

I think there are as many reasons for dropping as there are students. Just yesterday, while this discussion was going on electronically, I received email from 2 of my students who are no longer attending. Allow me to quote:

"My family received death threats so I have to move> I have been under a lot of stress trying to make sense of it all. I really was enjoying myself in school but as a dad I could no longer keep my focus. I planned to drop my classes and move to Georgia."

Or, from a completely different note:

"I wanted to reassure you as a teacher, and clarify for my sake the reasons behind my lackadaisical manner toward your class. I have been in college for about 2 years. I have taken 2 classes every sem. I have never really put my full passion and effort into a class. The biggest factor is lack of passion/purpose. I don't mean passion in a sense of emotional hype, but rather sustaining purpose and meaning for what I am doing."

I've followed this discussion with great interest, as my one big disappointment in returning to the classroom is the drops I've encountered. Like Norv expressed, I've had the "stops" that just don't show up any more, but I've also had (what seems to me excessive) "drops." Throughout the semester my thoughts on the subject of student drops have gone like this: "Maybe it's the discipline; accounting to some students is one big "math" story problem???" Maybe it's me--yikes, that's scary! Maybe it's the way I've structured the course?" Throughout the semester I've continued to search for the "why" and have had some good hallway discussions with colleagues on the subject. Nearly every colleague has comforted me with statements like, "It's not you; it's happening to everybody"; and, yet, I'm not satisfied because I want to understand the reasons why my students drop. I walk by classrooms that appear to be "full" and I ask myself, "Why is such and such a class still full, and my class (and many others) is empty?" What are the faculty with full classes doing (or not doing) that results in better retention?

I appreciate the comments Lisa shared regarding creating community. The fact that you did not make the same effort in the evening class and experienced significantly higher drop outs may indicate that the extra time in creating community is a significant factor in your outstanding retention for the semester. In any case, it gives me something to think about for next semester.

I also appreciated Lanny's comments regarding study abroad and the discussion that followed regarding the cost of education that Drew and others contributed to. While one thing I love about community colleges is accessibility and affordability, the system does encourage lack of commitment.

I'd like to second Nov's and other's suggestion that there be some solid research done to help us better understand "dropping behavior." While there is a good body of research literature on the subject, it would be instructive and helpful to study our own students' behavior. In addition, please continue the online conversations among faculty colleagues. It is very helpful to know we are not alone, and to grow in understanding as we read what other colleagues have to say about important topics like this one. In particular, thank you, Maureen for your insightful comments. They were very instructive.

Thanks for the discussion opportunity, Marybeth. I appreciate having an opportunity to share thoughts on this important subject.

I've gotten into this thread late, but a couple of things come to mind:

I too think sometimes that the (relatively) low cost of community college makes for lower commitment, but if that were true wouldn't the persistence and retention rates have been rising as the price per unit rose? I am a community college alum, and when I attended there was NO cost, except for the purchase price of books and supplies -- my admittedly spotty memory doesn't include classes that were half empty by the end of a term.

I do wonder if part of the problem is that, for some students, it's the first time they have had the opportunity/responsibility for choosing the courses for which they enroll, and that the information available to them re: the courses creates a situation where they end up in courses that are a poor fit.

I would like to propose a suggestion -- why not put into place a short questionnaire that students would complete (of course with the proviso that they can decline to participate!) when the person withdraws from classes? Maybe just two or three questions...

I would be really interested, given that I have heard from a number of people, to know if the withdrawal rate is indeed higher than in previous terms...is there "something going on" that we are not aware of??

Lastly, in a shameless plug for referrals to career counseling -- it is well documented in student development literature that those with educational intent -- a declared major, a stated vocational goal, etc. -- have higher completion rates than those without. Many of us in the Counseling Department have expertise in working with students to develop clearer career goals, and we would be most appreciative of referrals (right, Steve L.?) Thanks again, Marybeth, for making these discussion threads come to life, and thanks to all my colleagues for the opportunity to work with you to serve students!

In his message below, Drew threw out an idea that perhaps community colleges are too accessible and that students would appreciate the experience better if they paid more for it. While I agree that students would value their education more if they had to pay for it or work hard to pay for it, I am concerned that higher costs will "punish" students who cannot afford it, especially those who are first in their family to be in college. Speaking from a personal point of view, since there is no college tradition in families of first generation college students, many of whom come from low-income and/or immigrant families, it is difficult enough to make the decision to go to college without the added worry of the expense of college. If you add the fact that tuition is going to be more expensive or that there will be less financial aid to family or social pressures (e.g. to get a job to help support the family; to get married, etc.), then many of these students will just give up without even trying college.

What I am more concerned is another trend I see in the CRC Library that disturbs me. I sometimes see students coming in with their parents to work on assignments or go through the online orientation for registration. This, by itself, is laudable—it's great to have parents involved in students' learning! Unfortunately, frequently, when I see the student-parent pair, it is the parent who is doing the work or completing the assignments; the student is either relegated to observer status or has tuned out completely and is not even paying attention. I have also worked with parents who come to the library alone to do all the legwork in finding research materials for their child's paper.

Even more disturbing to me is that I have found the same trend with elementary students and their parents when I worked at a public library when I was in Washington State. I'm not sure if California has the same growing trend where parents are completing their elementary students' assignments, though some discussions with public librarians here suggest that it is. If that's the case, and parents are doing most of the work for these students, and the students do not need to exert any effort to complete their assignments, how is this affecting the attitudes and behaviors of the students when they enter college? How confident will these students be in their study skills and how lost will they be without their parent guide/enabler?

So, instead of raising the tuition and fees, which is a hardship to low-income students and a barrier to learning, I would be more interested in exploring ways to mentor or guide students so that they can be more successful in college. It can be quite bewildering to go to college, get to choose the classes you want and be responsible for your own learning when many of those choices have always been made for you in K-12. As Lisa Marchand and Lanny Hertzberg have illustrated in their examples, perhaps adding a touch of caring and community along with clear expectations will encourage students to stay in class and keep learning.

Wow! Great discussion! Thanks for the topic!

I strongly believe that increasing tuition isn't a solution. Our open door policy is an exceptional opportunity for ALL ADULTS to improve their lives, and thereby, our society at large.

I really appreciate the concept of community, and the need for more opportunities to "expand" the classroom beyond our local walls and campus.

There is discussion going on in Matriculation (the process of step one to apply to the final step of completion) of mandatory orientation.

I'm sensing here a consensus on mandatory MATRICULATION. That is, a thorough and complete process for ALL students, regardless of their demographic background.

There is no way to GUARANTEE success, but it might help if we had all of the following:

1. A mandatory assessment and orientation for COLLEGE behaviors, expectations, procedures and responsibilities.
2. A consensus by all faculty and managers of what behaviors WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED, with support to ENFORCE our policies.
3. A re-evaluation of the campus climate. That is, we are becoming more like a corporate model with top down management. If we returned to our former model of "shared governance" in which ALL segments had input and equal opportunities for staff development, our research projects and findings might be more ground-breaking and insightful.

Thanks for this opportunity to speak,

Connectedness April 06

An interesting question came up in a conversation lately. A fair amount of research has shown that students who feel connected to the college have higher success rates (try typing in "connectedness student success" as key words in Google or something similar (lots of info will come up). The next question has to do with us, the faculty. Do we do better if we feel a sense of connectedness to the college - does having a sense of being at home at CRC help us be better teachers? How do we gain, and maintain, such a connectedness? Can, and do, we transmit this to our students?

Connectedness -- and a related concept of "mattering." Google Schlossberg, Nancy K., and links to work she and others did in the 1980s, 1990s may come up. Feeling that one matters to at least one other person on campus is suggested to be one predictor of persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini's work (1991, new edition, sorry don't have the date, maybe 2001?) "How College Affects Students," is a rich source of studies, data, and ideas.

To address your first question "...do we feel better..." I would say, at least for myself, certainly. How do I gain that connectedness? Through joining, finding or creating "community" with those of like minds; through involvement in things in which I feel not only competence, but a sense that my efforts can have a positive effect; the positive self-efficacy that occurs when I am successful working with students and my colleagues; when I feel like I am a part of "something larger than myself."

It strikes me that those seem very much like the qualities of an environment which I found as a student at the community college where I first began this foray into higher education. When I worked in telecommunications, it was not that different -- the focus or our efforts were, but the essentials of our human connectedness were not. This may be true for others, not so much for myself, but the sense of environmental "fit," that one is in the right place, that one's space "feels" comfortable (those who personalize their work spaces to a greater degree may be creating that to some extent).

For me, not so much the physical space as the psychological space -- finding interesting people to work and converse with -- doing things like this.

I think very much we "transmit" that to our students -- it is in the enthusiasm we all bring to our work, the sense of enjoyment in coming to CRC every work day. I have had countless students (and this is something that I have not always experienced at the other colleges at which I have worked) tell me that one of the reasons they came to CRC is that others had told them that "people are nice there," that we seem interested in the students (as

a general sense of the place), that it doesn't seem like such a big, impersonal place, and that they stay because they have found what they were told to be true.

The fact that I feel like I can put this out where folks I don't know will read this, but I feel comfortable doing so is an example of the sense of safety and acceptance -- really powerful things for students who may not have been successful in educational environments in the past, and feeling somewhat uncertain about this one. I sense that we don't only do this for each other, but for our students also on a regular basis.

Thanks for letting me "share."

To all...someone observed that I mentioned "faculty" in the last discussion post and failed to mention the rest of us. I most assuredly did not mean to slight the classified staff or the managers and I offer my humble apologies. I was thinking about the next question, which was about teaching, and I goofed. Clearly all of us are included in the sense of connection and all of us can have immense impacts on our students and our colleagues.

One way of showing connectedness is to be able to help students with Campus resources,/ opportunities and get to know your colleagues. This shows students that you are part of a team, not just an individual working on their own.

Work plagiarized from the internet March 06

Hello all,

Phil Summers sent the interesting comments below for discussion. I have also seen this increasing dramatically. Personally, I try to use the following strategies, more or less successfully:

1. I spend a fair bit of time in class teaching them how to write, in my case about biology, clearly and concisely. I use group work, practice questions which are collected and commented on but have no grade recorded, verbal demonstrations and discussions, etc.
2. I've shifted to more assignments that are difficult to copy from the internet, e.g. reports on inquiry projects, and fewer standard term papers.
3. I tell the students that this type of plagiarism is cheating and then I spend a lot of time using Google to find the copiers. Google works well for me for this purpose, but it still takes hours to check many papers. If I do catch someone, and it happens regularly, I give them a zero on that work.

Tell us all how you deal with this, and what you do about other types of cheating.

Here is a topic for discussion:

The number of reports I get handed in from students that are plagiarized from the internet is exploding! Even though I warn my students against copy/paste I still get them. I tell my students to use their own words. It occurred to me that this might discriminate against those students who are not fluent in English. Sure enough, most of these reports are from students with difficulty in English. My classes require students to be able to express themselves logically and (somewhat) grammatically.

I find that terms we take for granted (such as cheating and plagiarism) need to be defined, and examples given. The first attachment is a section from one of my course syllabi and the second attachment is a handout I give before an assignment is due that gives examples of proper and improper paraphrasing. I need to refine these, but they at least get a conversation going with students who are trying to do the right thing, but do not know how.

Particular failures of academic integrity (which include a variety of behaviors in addition to cheating and plagiarizing e.g. knowingly furnishing false information, etc.) generally stem from a variety of causes.

Significant amongst these is ignorance on the part of the student. (Fred is right, we cannot take for granted that students understand what we mean when adjure them not to cheat or plagiarize. We also cannot take for granted that students understand the extent, nature or source of the disvalue academia places on cheating and plagiarizing. We must educate our students in respect to these elements of academic socialization just as we educate them in respect to others and just as we educate them in respect to discipline-specific content.) Also significant are student-teacher relationship issues (studies show that students are less likely to intentionally cheat or plagiarize if they respect their teachers) and general motivational issues (studies show that students are less likely to intentionally cheat or plagiarize on an assignment they perceive to be of value).

Strategies for addressing failures of academic integrity are, roughly speaking, either aimed at detection (catching and punishing students who plagiarize or cheat) or aimed prevention (keeping students from cheating and plagiarizing in the first place.) Prevention strategies, in turn, are, roughly speaking, either of the student-external or the student-internal variety. Ultimately, as I see it, over-reliance on student-external approaches like devising novel assignments or requiring students to submit essays "certified to be clean" by Turnitin.com merely generates a kind of academic arms race in which (at least the more determined) students devise new means of cheating or plagiarizing which circumvent the present set of external constraints. While student-external prevention strategies have some place in the total solution to the present crisis of academic integrity, the most important elements in that solution are the student-internal prevention strategies; those based on the kind of contributions to a student's academic socialization Fred has identified as well as those that address relationship and general motivational issues.

I like the fact you are defining terminology and giving examples in your syllabus, because students do not always understand what we are saying. Students have to do their own observations and reports in my classes, so "plagiarism" isn't the same issue for me that it is for many of you.

On the other hand, I have to be sure the expectations and instructions for the reports are very clearly stated in a step-by-step outline. Some don't know how to proceed with a "narrative" format!! I find we're all English teachers regardless of our area of expertise. Now I'm going to make additional efforts to inform my students about the many times they will need writing skills in early childhood.....from writing notes to parents, taking dictation from children, to record keeping and evaluations. Thanks for the examples.

Surveys of students – Class responsibilities - Feb 06

Recently, a couple of us conducted informal surveys in our classes which produced interesting answers. We thought you might be interested in asking your students something similar. If you do, let us know how the results turn out.

Why do students drop part-way through the class? I asked my GE Biology class this question as a bonus at the end of an exam (it was worth a couple of extra credit points) and got many thoughtful responses. What surprised me was the number of students who indicated that people drop classes because they do badly on early tests or assignments and have no idea of how to fix the problem – several mentioned that the students are reluctant to approach faculty for help in this case. I wonder how many students we lose, not because they are lazy, but because they are lost with respect to how to overcome deficits in background or study skills. Would it help if we more strongly invited them to come to us for help, stressing that we may be able to show them how to improve in the class?

Why don't students complete their homework? Dave Hodapp surveyed his class about this (he can send you his short survey if you are interested) and reports the following:

50% of the respondents indicated that one of the reasons they did not complete the assignments on time was because of technical difficulties (which I had suspected).

But what was surprising to me was that 50% of the respondents also indicated one of the reasons for not completing the assignments were family obligations. For some of them this was the major reason.

33% replied that work was a factor and 33% also indicated that they had too many other classes.

33% said that finding a computer was also a factor in not completing assignments.

What do you think?

I wasn't surprised by the answers, as I have morning classes with mostly younger students. Family issues are huge. A student told me yesterday that she will be dropping my class as she needs to get a paying job to help her family and hopes to be back this summer. The lack of computers and printers is another big one. In addition, my syllabus states that I will take late papers and deduct some points, but some have made the assumption that I won't take these papers, so they don't turn them in. Now I am seeing students take my class for the second time after failing the first time, because they finally get it!

If you read that book, "Framework of Poverty," you will see that for many people who have a family history of poverty, family obligations (I'm not referring to overwhelming family issues, but ones others may consider "minor") take precedence over work and school, when people who are not from a background of poverty will prioritize work or school over those kinds of family conflicts. Your own observations about students who feel swamped by early failures really makes sense to me, and I am thinking of ways to make myself more available to students right at the beginning. The problem is, at that time of the course, you are still forming relationships with your students, and the connections are not as easy. I'm thinking I have to keep on top of all grading more carefully at the beginning and contact students who fall behind right away. Thanks for your continued work on behalf of our students.

I think these interesting responses suggest a need for intervention at the beginning of the students' academic careers, teaching them about the avenues available to assist them, the kinds of problems that they might encounter (peer models could be very helpful in this regards, to "normalize" the issue). Also, assisting the students in better understanding the need for managing time in the same way they might manage a household budget (if I only have "X" amount of time, how do I apportion it?). These two findings suggest an area in which we (instructional and "non-instructional" faculty) could work collaboratively.

Is there a first year student tour/workshop offered by the college to provide the students with information on where they can use computers, how to interact with faculty, how to make their college years more successful and possibly, how to cope with outside distractions. Possibly this workshop should be a required first term activity for all starting students. If one has not started, possibly we could make a voluntary program and start a longitudinal study of their success when compared to students that have opted in not attending such a program. Giving them the required tools will go a long way and letting them know that faculty are here to help, support, and that we are all human just like them. As such their education should be looked at as a team effort. It is hard to understand that some of our students don't have free availability to a computer, something that we have all taken for granted. Do we know the percentage of households within the CRC area that have computers in their home? Just a thought!

My Comment would be that many students don't have study skills and need tutors early on in the semester. Maybe there is some way we can make it easier for set up peer helpers. Perhaps by having links on the college website saying "Register as a Tutor" and "Find a Tutor"??

I am interested in this particular discussion because it is directly related to our classroom experience. Family, health and money issues are constants with my students. I just had a student come by from another campus taking a Saturday class that feels she cannot continue, but wants to sit in on one of our classes and learn what she can without the pressure of a grade. It occurred to me that she is willing to come, but the commitment to course work and grade responsibility is not there. I am curious about our student's thinking processes sometimes. Anyway, add me to the list.

There are great! I'm pursuing an EdD (one day, I won't be tired anymore!), so I find this fascinating. The fourth response reminds me of classroom discussions we've had around retention/persistence. Freshmen orientation programs at universities represent one approach to dealing with this. I think it would be great to have something like this for new students. Of course, it's a daunting challenge given the diversity of our students (evening courses, online, etc.)