

# Seven Principles for Good Practice: Enhancing Student Learning

The Seven Principles Resource Center  
Winona State University

*The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education grew out of a review of '50 years of research on the way teachers teach and students learn' (Chickering and Gamson, 1987, p. 1) and a conference that brought together a distinguished group of researchers and commentators on higher education. The primary goal of the Principles' authors was to identify practices, policies, and institutional conditions that would result in a powerful and enduring undergraduate education. (Sorcinelli, 1991, p. 13)*

The following principles are anchored in extensive research about teaching, learning, and the college experience.

## 1. Good Practice Encourages Student – Instructor Contact

Frequent student – instructor contact in and out of classes is a most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Instructor concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few instructors well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.

### *Implementation Ideas:*

- Share past experiences, values, and attitudes.
- Design an activity that brings students to your office during the first weeks of class.
- Try to get to know your students by name by the end of the first three weeks of the term.
- Attend, support, and sponsor events led by student groups.
- Treat students as human beings with full real lives; ask how they are doing.
- Hold “out of class” review sessions.
- Use email regularly to encourage and inform.
- Hold regular “hours” in the Michigan Union or residence halls where students can stop by for informal visits.
- Take students to professional meetings or other events in your field.

## 2. Good Practice Encourages Cooperation Among Students

Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions improves thinking and deepens understanding.

### *Implementation Ideas:*

- Ask students to share each other's backgrounds and academic interests.
- Encourage students to prepare together for classes or exams.
- Create study groups within your course.
- Ask students to give constructive feedback on each other's work and to explain difficult ideas to each other.
- Use small group discussions, collaborative projects in and out of class, group presentations, and case study analysis.
- Ask students to discuss key concepts with other students whose backgrounds and viewpoints are different from their own.
- Encourage students to work together.

## 3. Good Practice Encourages Active Learning

Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to instructors, memorizing assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives.

They must make what they learn part of themselves.

*Implementation Ideas:*

- Ask students to present their work to the class.
- Give students concrete, real life situations to analyze.
- Ask students to summarize similarities and differences among research findings, artistic works or laboratory results.
- Model asking questions, listening behaviors, and feedback.
- Encourage use of professional journals.
- Use technology to encourage active learning.
- Encourage use of internships, study abroad, service learning and clinical opportunities.
- Use class time to work on projects.

#### **4. Good Practice Gives Prompt Feedback**

Knowing what you know and don't know focuses learning. Students need appropriate feedback on performance to benefit from courses. In getting started, students need help in assessing existing knowledge and competence. In classes, students need frequent opportunities to perform and receive suggestions for improvement. At various points during college, and at the end, students need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how to assess themselves.

*Implementation Ideas:*

- Return examinations promptly, preferably within a week, if not sooner.
- Schedule brief meetings with the students to discuss their progress.
- Prepare problems or exercises that give students immediate feedback on how well they are doing. (e.g., Angelo, 1993)
- Give frequent quizzes and homework assignments to help students monitor their progress.
- Give students written comments on the strengths and weakness of their tests/papers.
- Give students focused feedback on their work early in the term.
- Consider giving a mid-term assessment or progress report.
- Be clear in relating performance level/expectations to grade.
- Communicate regularly with students via email about various aspects of the class.

#### **5. Good Practice Emphasizes Time on Task**

Time plus energy equals learning. There is no substitute for time on task. Learning to use one's time well is critical for students and professionals alike. Students need help in learning effective time management. Allocating realistic amounts of time means effective learning for students and effective teaching for instructors.

*Implementation Ideas:*

- Communicate to students the amount of time they should spend preparing for class.
- Expect students to complete their assignments promptly.
- Underscore the importance of regular work, steady application, self-pacing, scheduling.
- Divide class into timed segments so as to keep on task.
- Meet with students who fall behind to discuss their study habits, schedules.
- Don't hesitate to refer students to learning skills professionals on campus.
- Use technology to make resources easily available to students.
- Consider using mastery learning, contract learning, and computer assisted instruction as appropriate.

#### **6. Good Practice Communicates High Expectations**

Expect more and you will get it. High expectations are important for everyone—for the poorly prepared, for those unwilling to exert themselves, and for the bright and well motivated. Expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when instructors hold high expectations for themselves and make extra efforts.

*Implementation Ideas:*

- Make your expectations clear at the beginning of the course both in writing and orally. Tell them you expect them to work hard.
- Periodically discuss how well the class is doing during the course of the semester.
- Encourage students to write; require drafts of work. Give students opportunities to revise their work.

- Set up study guidelines.
- Publish students' work on a course website. This often motivates students to higher levels of performance.
- Be energized and enthusiastic in your interaction with students.

## 7. Good Practice Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning

There are many roads to learning. People bring different talents and styles of learning to college. Students rich in hands-on experiences may not do so well with theory. Students need the opportunity to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. They can be pushed to learning in new ways that do not come so easily.

### *Implementation Ideas:*

- Use a range of teaching activities to address a broad spectrum of students.
- Provide extra material or exercises for students who lack essential background knowledge or skills.
- Identify students' learning styles, backgrounds at the beginning of the semester.
- Use different activities in class – videos, discussions, lecture, groups, guest speakers, pairwork.
- Use different assignment methods – written, oral, projects, etc. – so as to engage as many ways of learning as possible (e.g., visual, auditory).
- Give students a real-world problem to solve that has multiple solutions. Provide examples and questions to guide them.

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