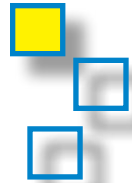


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Lander University's

Article submissions encouraged.
Send articles to: sgrund@lander.edu

White Board



Become An Effective Teacher & Save Your Valuable Teaching Time and Energy

Center for Effective Undergraduate Teaching (864) 388-8426



"I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn." - Albert Einstein

The Academic Manner

SOMEONE WHO DOES testing for colleges just informed me of a remarkable statistic. Fully 70 percent of students who enter the Cal State system have to go into a remedial course. That's a figure higher than the national average, which puts around 29 percent of students in four-year colleges in remediation (and 43 percent for two-year college students).

They end up there because in certain subjects and areas, mainly reading, writing, and math, they are not prepared to handle college-level work. If they were to enroll in a regular freshman course, they would earn a D or F. What this means is that colleges increasingly are obligated to provide pre-college, high-school level instruction.

And when we look at the success of those courses, we find that, of students enrolled in them, only 13 percent of them proceed to complete their career and earn a bachelor's degree. (<http://www.aei.org/outlook/100071>.)

Something isn't happening for all-too-many young people in the last year of high school and the first year of college that gives them the momentum to advance.

Gerald Graff has been arguing for years that one of the main causes of student failure and dropouts doesn't stem from knowledge and skill deficiencies. Rather, it comes from an incomplete acculturation to academic mores and manners. Here in The New York Times a few weeks ago, Graff made the point again, claiming that their ordinary classroom experience "doesn't add up to a real socialization into the ways of intellectual culture." Specifically, what students (and their teachers) so frequently misunderstand is that their success depends on knowing how to conduct an academic conversation.

They don't realize how important it is to formulate an argument, to listen to someone else and work out a refutation, or even a confirmation. They don't see the point of a clear and direct summary. They can't pinpoint areas of controversy and consensus. They don't respect the value of ideas and ideologies.

This is a matter of acculturation, as I said, and it requires that teachers spend more time with students outside of class talking about readings, exchanging opinions, and disagreeing. Young people need coaching in intellectual behavior. If more of it happened, that retention rate might go up.

But then, professors would have to put down their pencils and set aside their keyboards, letting that book and article and conference paper sit for a while. And that certainly isn't going to help them when it comes time for annual reports.

Mark Bauerlein, October 3, 2009,
The Chronicle of Higher Education, Brainstorm,
[<http://chronicle.com/blogPost/The-Academic-Manner/8321/>]
October 16, 2009



CALENDAR

TOOLS OF THE TRADE COMMERCIAL ASSESSMENT TOOLS (COURSE ID: 201010EUT3)

Thursday, December 10, 2009
12:40 - 1:40 p.m. Dawson Room

Assessment Conversation

Dr. André M. Lubecke

Chair, Department of Mathematics
and Computing

While there are other commercial tools being used in some programs (ie: Business and Nursing), the Educational Testing Service's (ETS) Major Field Tests (MFT) are comprehensive undergraduate outcomes assessments designed to measure the critical knowledge and understanding obtained by students in a major field of study. The MFT offers comprehensive national comparative data enabling the evaluation of students' performance and comparing our program's effectiveness to programs at similar institutions nationwide.

Participants (whether using the MFT, another commercial tool or no commercial tool at all) will have an opportunity to discuss how they are being used in some programs and the value they bring to the major program assessment effort.

Fall Exams Dec. 14-18, 2009

WHITE BOARD

2009-10 Publication Dates

First Monday of the Month

September 7	March 1
October 5	April 5
November 2	May 3
December 7	June 7
January 4	July 5
February 1	August 2

Newsletters Archive [HERE](#)

Center for Effective
Undergraduate Teaching

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The Seven Habits of Highly Deflective Colleagues

*Do you have a colleague who can be classed as collega deflectivus?
Or, heaven forbid, are you one yourself?*

UPON BEGINNING our college teaching careers, we expected that some students would greet assignments by deftly dodging responsibility for late submissions: "My dog ate my notes." "My flash drive got flushed down the toilet." The blame game and the excuse ruse are familiar ploys among student procrastinators seeking to deflect course requirements. Less expected among early-career realities was our discovery that such deflection was not exclusive to the student community. In fact, our own colleagues—deans, chairs, fellow professors, and administrative assistants—had made substantial strides in their deflective habits since their student days. Our first few days on campus were peppered with deflective responses to requests: "An extra power strip for your office? You'll need to contact someone in facilities management about that." "More graduate assistant time? Get me some productivity data and work up a business plan."

According to Wikipedia, that trusted scholarly source, the meaning of "deflection" varies, depending on its contextual use. For example, deflection can mean bending under load (in engineering) or even shooting ahead of a moving target (in military contexts). Our favorite meaning, because it reflects the deflection we've experienced, comes from physics, in which it is defined as an event in which an object collides and bounces against a plane surface.

For this effort, we define deflection as a strategy to bounce action or responsibility away from oneself and toward another person, time, or place. Although we contend that deflection occurs in all areas of personal and professional life, we limit our focus to the deflective colleague (*collega deflectivus*) in academe. Our extensive qualitative fieldwork across our own campus, conducted over several years, revealed seven natural habits of deflective colleagues, which we are pleased to share below.

First, though, a few basic facts about deflection. Deflection in and of itself is not bad, and by extension, neither is a deflective colleague, in the right circumstances. Say a student cannot enroll in a required but full class because of his tardy class registration. He calls his faculty adviser asking for her personal intercession. What's a caring adviser to do? The adult-learning literature is clear that students who take responsibility for their own learning benefit most from their educational pursuits. Knowing this, and wanting what is best for the student, the faculty adviser immediately deflects: "What

a shame you can't get into class X. Ask our administrative assistant for that instructor's phone number and give him a call. Good luck with that!"

Next, deflective strategies, understood in the framework of "habits," can be learned and automated to increase efficiency by any academician, regardless of disciplinary affiliation or rank. As our examples will show, both new and more seasoned colleagues can deflect, and deflection can direct up the chain of command or flow down the drainpipe, spilling out across the campus.

Now, without further deflection, here are the seven habits.

Circumspect Deflect. From your first day on campus through the next seven years, keep this simple technique readily available. Upon a request for procedural information, assume a puzzled but attentive air, punctuated with "hmmm." Follow with some variation of "I'm the new gal around here, and I don't want to steer you in the wrong direction. You'd better check with an expert, such as [insert name of 'expert' here]." Don't commit, and you won't be asked again.

Classic Deflect. Leadership literature overflows with classic deflection strategies from which you can liberally borrow. When presented with an idea from a valued colleague requiring your potential action, first acknowledge its goodness; then, immediately direct it to a holding pen. "Good idea! Bring me data to support it," or "Good idea! Form a committee to consider it," or "Good idea! Run it past my associate dean," or even, "Good idea! Gather data, form a committee, and run it past so-and-so, and get busy on a strategic plan for it."

Cog-in-the-Wheel Deflect. Remember the Journey song, "Wheel in the Sky"? "Wheel in the sky keeps on turning / I don't know where I'll be tomorrow." A slight word change increases its relevancy: cog in the wheel keeps on turning. You want to assist your colleagues, but you are powerless to do so: the department chair, dean's office, graduate school, or some other larger, more powerful entity makes the rules; you are just a cog in the wheel. Keep turning.

Sycophant Deflect. Your colleague has a brilliant idea, so shiny and so fantastic that before acting on it, you gush over it and then suggest that he take the idea up for executive review. However, before going up, you suggest he dig deep to guarantee he fully understands the contextual history behind his idea. Shortly, your colleague is dazed. Should he go up and then down? Down and

then up? Both simultaneously? Whew!

Pirouette Deflect. A subject crash lands on the programmatic, departmental, or committee table, and it's an inconvenient truth, to quote a popular Internet inventor. What to do? Spin. Spin the subject around and about until colleagues lose track of the original subject, and it morphs into one of your choosing. "Weapons of mass destruction? Actually, the issue is bringing democracy to the people." Closer to home: "A budget deficit? Actually, it's a way to reposition departmental assets."

Introspect Deflect. Tired of youngsters with fancy ideas promising to impinge on your time and territory? Here's a technique for long-time colleagues and those who (even slightly) predate their colleagues. As others discuss the idea, appear interested and press one index finger to the lips as your head gently bobs in agreement. Then, join the discussion by helpfully noting, "Oh, we tried that [months, years, decades ago], and it didn't work. Boy, history is a great teacher, isn't it?" Deflection accomplished.

Paralysis-by-Analysis Deflect. Earlier, we noted we had spent years in careful observation of *collega deflectivus*. This is only partially true. We also spent years discussing, but never writing, this current piece on deflection. Frankly, we are amazed this article is in print, given the intensive deflection it encountered. To that, we can only add a final strategy discovered while writing this piece: the "I need more time to fully investigate it" deflection. We'll get back to you about this technique . . . upon further investigation.

For those wanting to master these habits for their own benefit, consider a few points. Knowing when to use the "right" deflective technique comes with practice. Don't be deterred; even those unskilled in the art of deflection can immediately use the simple reply to any question, "Let me think about that and get back to you." As your deflective skills grow, you will continually add to your repertoire, perhaps even inventing deflective techniques yet unknown to harness the power of future knowledge and technologies. First, however, check with an expert, run it past so-and-so, keep turning, take it up for review (but first dig deep for contextual history), then spin it. And don't ask for our help, because it didn't work before, even upon further investigation. We'll have to deflect on this one.

*Michelle Maher and Katherine Chaddock,
September-October 2009,
Academe Online, Features,
[<http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2009/SO/Feat/mahe.htm>],
October 20, 2009*