**Motivation is not enough: Proactive strategies to promote success for ALL students**

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The following examples are intended to provoke conversation and consideration of creative solutions to common dilemmas. The crises students face in learning may be new to them, but especially for those of us who have been teaching for a while, they are not new. What can we do to be proactive, to prevent common problems from becoming problems in the first place? What can we do to address these challenges before they occur, to be sure that we are genuinely assessing students’ achievement of learning outcomes and not confrontation with life’s obstacles?

Case examples:

1. Ben is enrolled in your face-to-face class that meets twice a week. Your syllabus indicates that class attendance and participation are required and worth 10% of the final course grade. It is now the fourth week of the semester and Ben has attended only on the first day and on the day of the first in-class midterm exam. When you email him to express your concern he tells you that his work schedule conflicts with the class schedule and he can only arrange for special time off on the four exam days.
2. Carlos is in the habit of asking for an extension for every writing assignment in your class. You already have a policy of being fairly lenient with deadlines, but Carlos is pushing even your flexible limits. Other students haven’t asked for extensions, and you worry that Carlos is gaining an unfair advantage because he is willing to ask.
3. Dorothy has been participating in class fairly consistently throughout the semester and has earned Bs and Cs on the exams and other assignments. With about five weeks remaining, she tells you that she may have to miss some classes soon, and may not be able to be present for scheduled exams because she has been diagnosed with cancer and must begin chemotherapy immediately. Stephanie faces a similar problem with being unable to attend classes and exams, but the reason is lack of dependable childcare.
4. Your course requires students to complete four non-cumulative midterm exams and one cumulative final exam, all equally weighted and worth 70% of the final course grade. Your classes are large, and you have a strict policy against offering make-up exams. To take into account that students sometimes have a good reason for missing exams, you allow them to drop their lowest exam score out of five. Esther earned a D on Exam 1, missed Exam 2 due to illness, and now has missed Exam 3. She is desperate for the chance to make up Exam 3 because she can’t afford to have zero points for one of the four exams that count. If you allow her to make up Exam 3, you are violating your own policy.
5. You have set up your classes to consist primarily of discussion of the material rather than straight lecture. At the beginning of the semester a number of students said they could not come to class prepared because they had not yet obtained copies of the textbook. Several weeks later, it still seems that many, if not most, students are unprepared to discuss the assigned readings. They either do not participate at all in discussions, or their participation is superficial and clearly uninformed.
6. Amelia began your course as an eager transfer student. She told you she is excited to be in the class, attends every session, and earns Bs on the major exams. She is used to earning As, however, and is frustrated that her usual efforts are not paying off. After the most recent exam, she comes to your office visibly distressed that she has again earned a B.
7. Fernando has been quite outspoken in his objections to course requirements. He doesn’t like the format of the exams, he calls the weekly writing assignments busy work, and he complains that class discussions are a waste of time. He has made it clear, both in class and in private conversations with you, that he sees you as doing your job only when you are lecturing. More specifically, you are only doing your job correctly when you are lecturing over the material that will be on the exam. Any time you take questions from the class or indicate that something is worth discussing just because it is interesting but is not on the exam, he rolls his eyes and even has told the class that it is time to get back to business.

Please note: Your mileage may vary! But I hope that you will take from these examples the idea that we can proceed AS IF we can make a difference even when it seems like circumstances are out of our control.