

Addressing Student Disengagement: Simple Ideas for Re-Igniting a Passion for Learning

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BASED ON ALL THE HEAD TILTS,
MAYBE I'D BETTER EXPLAIN
THIS AGAIN...



Over the past few years, College Professors have noted the following student behaviors have significantly increased:

Absenteeism/ Chronic Tardiness

Missing Deadlines on Assignments

Missing Testing Days

Not Paying Attention during Critical Lessons or Demonstrations

Sheer Exhaustion—From Work or Home Life

Overwhelmed with College Requirements

Any Others???

- ▶ “Too many professors think the answer to student disconnection is to double down on rigor, so they increase mandatory student checkpoints like quizzes...and strict deadlines. This creates a situation where any work that isn’t graded, like reading [textbooks] becomes deprioritized.”

**Tobias Wilson, English Professor,
Georgia Gwinnett College**

What Students Have Said

- ▶ “In high school, I did not have to study very often, so I did not come to college with many techniques to help me be successful.”
- ▶ “I want a student voice in class—not just listen to lecture every day—autonomy”
- ▶ Flexibility in Assignments—type and due date
- ▶ Variety in presentations and some Interactivity
- ▶ “Do Something” in class—more demonstration and activity

What can we do better?

*Become instructors who care about student success
& students as individuals*

- ▶ Students appreciate instructors who show that they care about the success of students—both academically and personally
- ▶ Assume Goodwill towards student; not predicted outcomes based on past experiences
- ▶ Be a skillful communicator and an active listener open to other points of view

- ▶ “When students feel like their professors care about their success and are there to help, they will be more committed and engaged.”

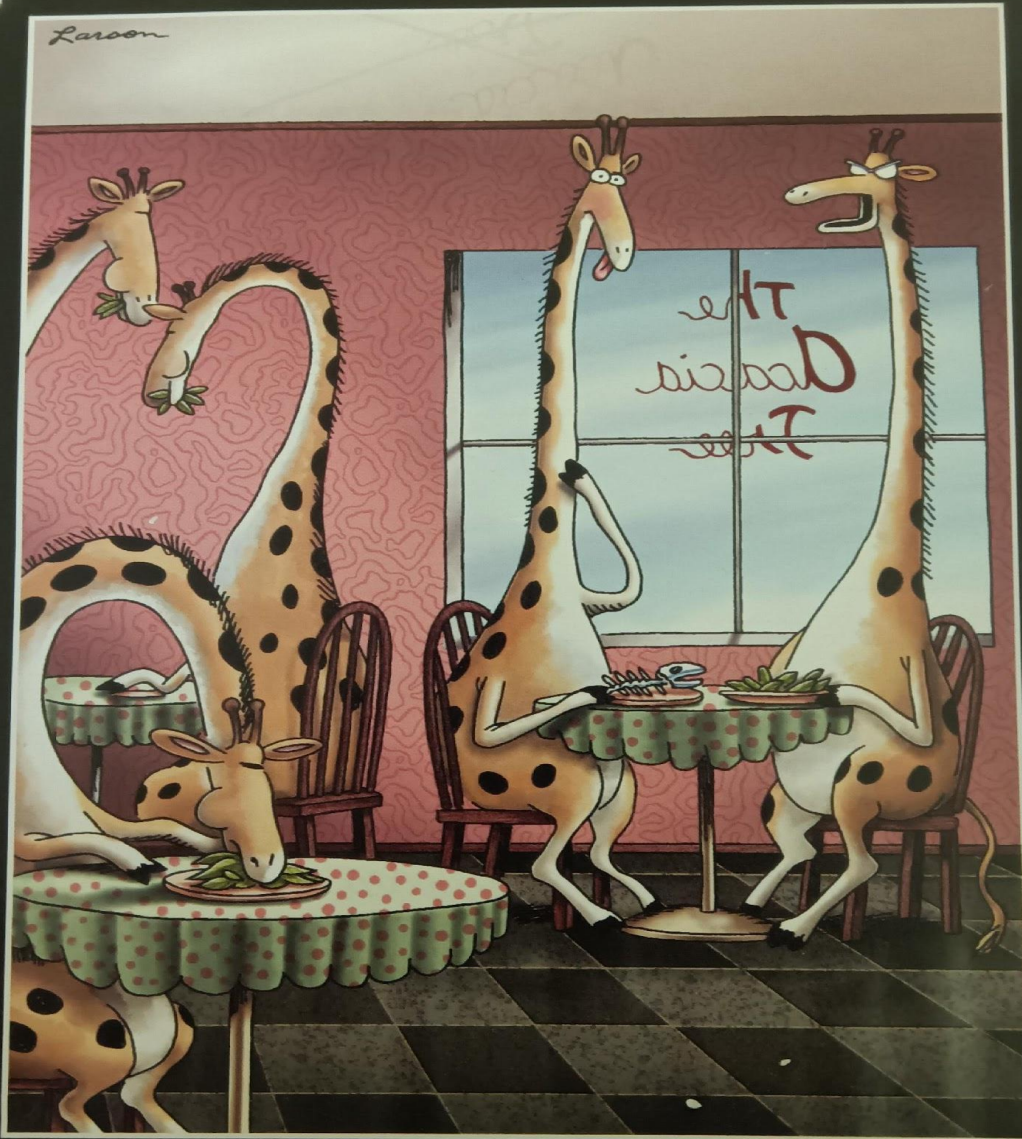
**Rebecca Glazier, Political Science Prof,
U of Arkansas @ Little Rock**

What Can We do Better?

*Become instructors who make students
excited to learn the subject matter*

- ▶ Superstar students will appreciate any tips on improving their academic abilities
- ▶ Even weak students will appreciate instructors who help them learn how to learn, learn how to get excited about learning, and master a topic—it is a skill that will eventually motivate even the weakest of students
- ▶ ***Humor can bridge many gaps!!

The Far Side by Gary Larson



“Well, if there’s a bone stuck in your throat, you deserve it!...Do you see anyone else around here stupid enough to order fish?”

Fostering Engagement starts the First Day of Class

How do you impact the first day of your class...Is this the type of Introduction you want to impact your students?

The Paper Chase (1973)

Impacting the First Day of Class

- ▶ “Start the semester off by fostering students’ curiosity, supporting their learning, and giving them a preview of how they will be engaging with you and one another, and with the course content.”

James M. Lang, former professor of English and director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at Assumption University, Worcester, MA. Author of many textbooks including *Distracted: Why Students Can’t Focus and What You Can Do About It* (Basic Books, 2020)

Impacting the First Day of Class

Don't start the day off by immediately handing out the syllabus and going over all the rules to abide by

Take the time to spark curiosity about the subject and foster Active Learning of the subject matter.

Impacting the First Day of Class

Have Students Prepare name cards by folding a supplied index card for their desk area:

- ▶ This will help the instructor learn student names quickly
- ▶ Nothing fosters disrespect more quickly on the first day when the instructor forgets a student's name or worse, addresses them by pointing
- ▶ If you ask students to choose a seat and stay with it, you can create a seating chart

Impacting the First Day of Class

Remind students of what they already know:

- ▶ Have them free write for five-ten minutes on what they already know about the topic and then share in small groups with other nearby students

(BTW: sharing is a great way to help some students develop possible study partners)

An Assignment for you

Right Now:

Think of your best first day of class idea that you use and share with your instructor desk mates for a few minutes

Impacting the First Day of Class

Ask the Students “What is your biggest worry about this course?”

Students should take a few minutes to write down their concerns, pick their number 1 concern; write it down on paper with their name.



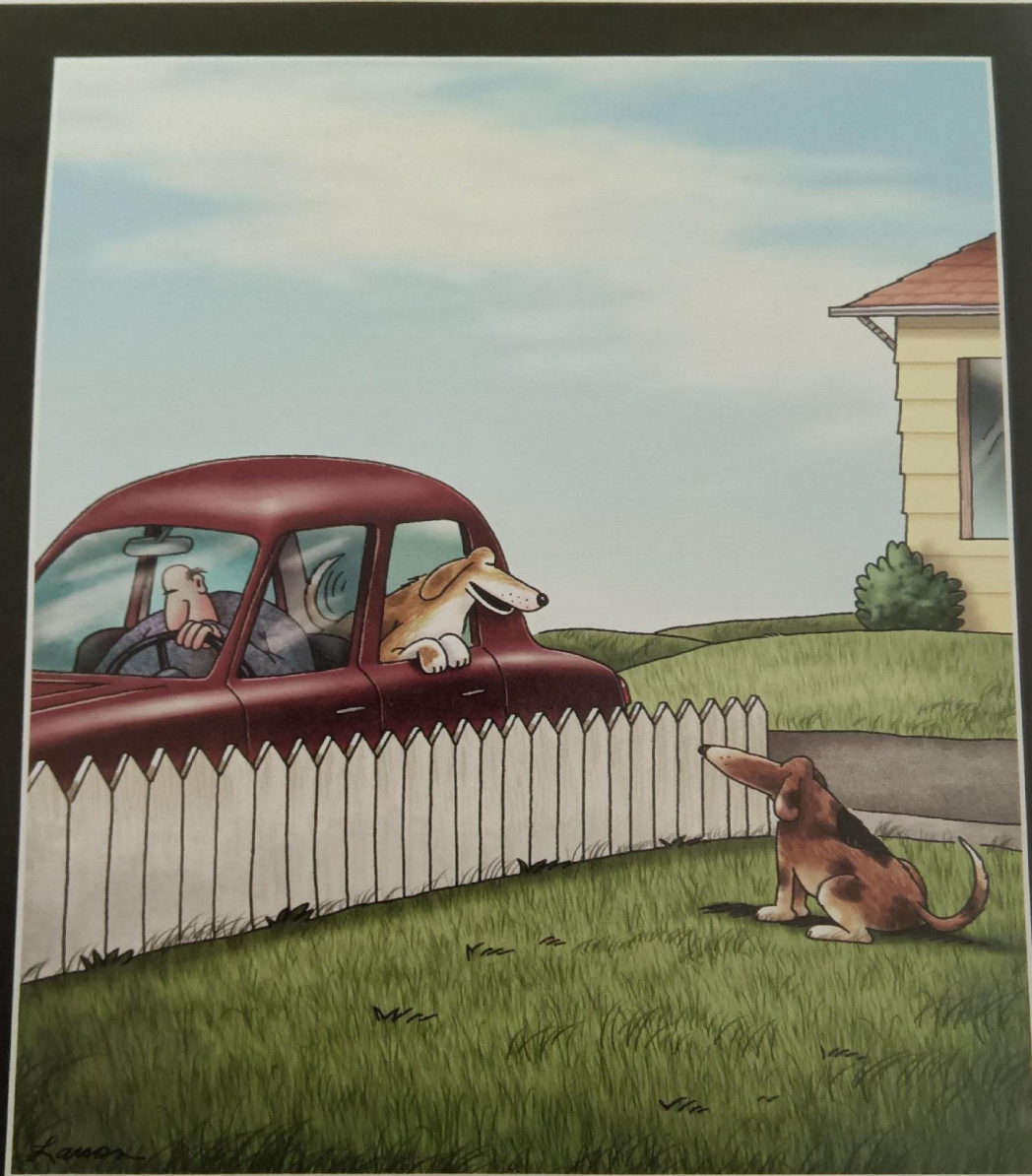
Give the paper to the instructor who will provide some guidance and an answer for you in the next couple days

Impacting the First Day of Class

For Students: Instructor should pose an intriguing question on the subject matter

- ▶ Perhaps something controversial or enlightening to get the students' brains turning
- ▶ This works well with Anatomy, Pharmacology, Behavior, Client Interaction courses
- ▶ Have students free-write on the same paper with their concerns or if time allows discuss with student colleagues

The Far Side by Gary Larson



- ▶ “Ha, ha, ha. Guess what? After we go to the drugstore and the post office, I’m going to the Vet to get tutored.”

Improving the Syllabus for better Student Engagement

Do you have college mandated Syllabus requirements?

See if you can translate some of the academic institutional language into plain, readable English

Put in some headings to break up the text

Creating the Engaging Syllabus

- ▶ Do you really need everything in your syllabus—does it need to be over ten pages long—consider edits
- ▶ Make sure you proof-read for typos—remember it is one of the 1st documents students will see from you
- ▶ Watch the “Scolding” language—rephrase as positive consequences for success
 - Avoid ALL CAPS language
 - Instead of listing out all the penalties for bad behavior, explain how good behavior creates success in this course & beyond

Creating the Engaging Syllabus

Surprise students with a gift of points buried in the syllabus to ensure they read the entire document

On the 2nd day of class—have an open-book quiz on the syllabus

Creating the Engaging Syllabus

In addition to your name and credentials/ degrees, tell your students something a little personal about yourself

- Verbalize why you like to teach the course
- What did you as instructor gain from this course during your schooling?



► My
Brilliant
Dog Eggsy!

My Charlie—a
little neurotic
Queen



Creating the Engaging Syllabus

- ▶ **Even bolder (and if college allows):**
 - Have students co-create the syllabus!!**
- ▶ **Get their input on attendance requirements (how many classes can they miss?)...But remember, overly strict attendance policies don't ensure motivated or engaged students**
- ▶ **Student input on consequences for late assignments**
 - Believe it or not, sometimes a student may be late with an assignment, but a clear and detailed course calendar will help to alleviate issues**
- ▶ **What happens if you miss a quiz, test, exam??**

Creating the Engaging Syllabus

- ▶ Finally, and if time allows at the end of the course, have a “Syllabus Evaluation Session” with student involvement
 - Review the reading assignments—could any of the reading be reduced?
 - Order of topics in the course—positive or negative feedback
 - Course Calendar—areas for improvement?



Increasing Student Engagement by Critically Reviewing your Slide Presentations

Improving the Slide Presentation for Better Student Engagement

“Powerpoint Definition: *noun*

- ▶ 1. Overused presentation tool that is an instructor’s joy and a learner’s nightmare;
- ▶ 2. A slide creation program that is as good, or as bad, as its live user;
- ▶ 3. A computer application that can either aid, or completely destroy—learning”

Sharon Bowman,

Bowperson Publishing & Training, 2017

Students Voice Frustrations from Course Evaluations

”I want my professors to stop reading slides word for word off a screen.”

”Why are the images on the screen the same as from the textbook...just refer to the textbook.”

”Allow us to use our laptops in class and upload the presentations for us to view at our desk.”

Improving Slide Presentations for Student Engagement

- ▶ I have stopped using the term “lecture”
Why??
- ▶ I also don't say “powerpoint” as that is manufacturer specific
- ▶ I use the term “presentation.” That is what students are getting; a presentation from a mentor who is not just a disseminator of facts or simply reading from a screen.

Improving Slide Presentations for Student Engagement

Reduce the number of Slides—be very critical of how many slides—how would you feel to sit through your presentation

Use more interesting images that are not in the textbook and less words

Improving Slide Presentations for Student Engagement

Think critically about your text language—again, how would you like to sit through one of your presentations and try and read the slide while the instructor is talking and the students are trying to take notes



Use humor and personal content to
break up the monotony

The Far Side by Gary Larson



- “For crying out loud, I was hibernating! ...Don’t you guys ever take a pulse?”

Break up the Presentation every 20-30 minutes with an activity with movement

- Probably not like this...

(11) A Dime for a Phone Call, Scene 30 - YouTube

Thoughts on Active Movement to Increase Student Engagement

“Sometimes professors operate as if having fun and feeling joy are at odds with doing serious, rigorous work. But that’s a false dichotomy. A sense of joy actually has cognitive benefits that support creativity, problem-solving, and teamwork. Joyful learning environments help students thrive.”

Eugene Korsunskiy,

Associate Professor of Engineering,
Dartmouth College




Go Fish Shuffle

Ela Browder
-Dept. of English
-Wake Technical
Community College


Go Fish Shuffle:

This activity takes about 30-45 minutes

Students will need two 3 x 5 index cards or cut sheets of paper.



The students will be randomly assigned a number so that names are not visible and this same number is printed on the back of each of the two cards; the cards are placed with this number down on the table in front of the student.



The students then number each card on the front with #1 and #2

Go Fish Shuffle



- ▶ The Instructor asks two questions that would elicit two answers from the students.
- ▶ The questions should elicit a response of multiple words (phrase or sentence) not a yes/no or true/false question. This is an open note time, but students are asked to try and respond from knowledge or memory. Give students about 10 minutes to respond. Responses should be kept to one phrase or one sentence
- ▶ EX: Simple recommendations on a pet diet for obesity, or suggestions for correcting a behavior problem, or possible symptoms of an animal that has ingested a foreign object..

Go Fish Shuffle

- ▶ Students then write their two responses on the cards, writing very plainly so others will be able to read
- ▶ Answer to question 1 on Card #1 and answer to question 2 on Card #2
- ▶ Students should be told to leave space on the card for more notes and input

Go Fish Shuffle

- ▶ The instructor picks up all the Cards #1 from the students, shuffles the cards and lays them out with the student assigned number up so the students cannot see the responses.
- ▶ Students come up and pick up one of the cards
- ▶ Students return to their desk with one Card #1; the instructor repeats the question and students review the response from the other student
- ▶ Students are then asked to provide more information on the card or clarify or provide their own answer to the question
- ▶ Students should be instructed to not make negative comments about the other student's answer, but provide more information or clarification or their own answer; no names or identifying marks
- ▶ No more than a few minutes should be allowed for these student responses

Go Fish Shuffle

- ▶ The instructor collects these Cards #1 from the second students and holds them for review
- ▶ After collecting and shuffling Card #2, the same process is repeated with a second student reviewing and responding to the second question
- ▶ While students are answering Card #2, the instructor can review answers to Card #1 to ensure there are no negative comments
- ▶ Once students have completed answering Card #2, these cards are collected by the instructor

Go Fish Shuffle

- ▶ The instructor then puts both sets of Card #1 and Card #2 in order of the student assigned number and returns these two cards to the original student for review.
- ▶ This is a great opportunity for students to see whether their own answers are valid and to get input from another voice in the class that is not the instructor
- ▶ This is also an opportunity for students to help each other anonymously
- ▶ Students can be advised that if they are unsure of their own responses or their student colleague responses, they may ask the instructor

- ## Go Fish Shuffle
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The background features a collage of images. On the left, there's a vertical strip showing several fish, possibly salmon, swimming in dark water. The rest of the background is a light, semi-transparent image of a large school of fish, likely salmon, swimming in clear water. Overlaid on the right side are several overlapping, semi-transparent green geometric shapes, primarily triangles and polygons, creating a modern, abstract design.

**Go Fish
Shuffle—
Let's Try it**



There are many ideas available for getting students moving in the college classroom. Check out Chronicle of Higher Education—available online

Suggest the next session:
“You got to Move It, Move It—Make your Lectures Less Boring” Sarah Meyer (Room 2)



This is why I moved to Washington State

Quick Thoughts on Increasing Attendance



Increasing Attendance

- ▶ Consider allowing “free skip days” during the semester, but not allow them to be used on exam days
- ▶ In first-year college courses for freshmen, taking attendance can be a good idea for students fresh out of high school—allows an expectation of accountability


Increasing Attendance

- ▶ Some students want to come to class for personal friendship—on the first day consider a mixer time to introduce themselves to a neighbor
- ▶ Have a list of general questions to discuss during this mixer time: high school of graduation, pets at home, favorite music or movie

Increasing Attendance

Students are more likely to attend when they have connection to the instructor—put yourself out in front, not just the topic or material

Cut back on the amount of course material put online to encourage attendance in class

- 
- ▶ **“We have to become igniters, we need to lean forward, walk around the room, peer over shoulders, and be intrusive, in both digital and physical spaces. We need to encourage and require student engagement.”**

Emily Isaacs,

**Exec Director of Faculty Advancement,
Montclair State University, NJ**



I love you so much, I don't know
how I could ever live without you.

Is that you or the
liquor talking?

It's me,
talking to
the liquor.



Questions?

- ▶ Dennis Lopez, M.Ed., LVT, FVTE
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