



# EXCHANGE

**New England Faculty Development Consortium**

**Message From The President**

**Promote Student Success: Stamp Out Student Bashing**

**Judy Miller, Clark University**

In keeping with our upcoming fall conference theme, I explore here one immediate, concrete way that we can all promote student success—by refusing to engage in, and speaking out against, student bashing, the kind of faculty coffee lounge chatter that garners a laugh at the expense of (mostly absent) students. Chickering and Gamson (1987) list “communicates high expectations” and “respects diverse talents and ways of learning” as two of their Seven Principles of Good Practice for Undergraduate Education. I contend that although faculty may engage in student bashing without malice and as a way of releasing stress, it creates a subtle but contagious climate of low expectations and disrespect that erodes relationships between faculty and students and ultimately diminishes student success. To illustrate, I share a personal story that has reverberated throughout my teaching career.

My first teaching stint was as an undergraduate teaching assistant in a large microbiology course. In an introductory microbiology lab, the fine motor skills to be learned are rather overwhelming. Students must simultaneously keep track of and manipulate the presence of flames and of flammable substances, of potentially harmful living organisms, and of sterile items and surfaces. Learners in such an environment make a lot of

mistakes, some of which are rather spectacular. On a crowded campus bus one morning, I regaled a friend with the list of “dumb” things my students had done. Later the same day, a graduate student who was a student in the course—hence older and wiser than I in areas other than microbiology—took me aside and tactfully called me on my ill-considered storytelling. He pointed out that publicly making fun of student mistakes cast me in an unprofessional light, and negatively affected the students’ attitude about me and the course. I was appropriately chastened, and from then on I watched my mouth in public situations.

When I became a faculty member, I found myself in the same position as that graduate student. I often overheard colleagues “student bashing” over the coffee pot, and it felt wrong. As I pondered, I came to believe that I should talk about students in their absence as I would if they were present, and in the way I knew that I should think about them—with respect for their value as people with talents and challenges that I would probably never appreciate, and for their struggles as learners. I observed that when I talked about students with respect, and when I conveyed to any listener, faculty or student, my belief that my students would work hard and succeed, I treated

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**From the Editors:**

The theme of the upcoming NEFDC Fall Conference is, “Accessing Academic Excellence: What Colleges Can Do to Promote Student Success”. Most of the articles in this issue of the NEFDC Exchange address that theme. The first articles deal with how we should “respect” all students and how we can all deal with “underachieving” students. Other articles stress the need to motivate students to achieve their own goals and move out of our comfort zone as an instructor to engage our students. Our last articles look specifically at how we can help graduate students with their research projects and how we can improve student retention.

Other parts of the newsletter provide information about resources and

activities that promote professional development. A new feature of the newsletter is a “Call to Graduate Students” from our new graduate student liaison who is looking for other graduate students to join her at future NEFDC conferences to work towards the particular professional development needs of graduate students.

And of course the events, the newsletter, and the website sponsored by NEFDC, as described throughout this issue, all exist purely to support professional development for faculty and staff.

We hope you enjoy this issue, and we welcome your feedback and future contributions.

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# Closing the Achievement Gap

**Pedro Noguera, PhD, Executive Director and Professor,  
Metropolitan Center for Urban Education,  
New York University; Keynote Speaker, 2009 CLMS Annual Conference**

The existence of the achievement gap is nothing new (Hedges & Nowell, 1999). But recently, efforts to narrow the achievement gap – the disparities in student academic outcomes that almost always manifest along distinct patterns of race and class – have become a national priority.

Since the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, the law's requirement that schools be held accountable for student achievement has brought a sense of urgency to improving the educational outcomes of historically low performing students (Ferguson, 2002). For the first time, efforts to eradicate – or at least reduce – the gap rank at the top of the nation's educational agenda.

In many communities, the pressures created by NCLB have compelled schools to place a greater emphasis on addressing the educational outcome disparities that all too frequently plague racial minorities, English Language Learners, special education students, and low-income students. (For an analysis of the relationship between race, socio-economic status and student achievement, see *An American*

*Imperative* by Miller and *The Black-White Achievement Gap*, edited by Jencks and Phillips.)

Yet in the seven years since the enactment of NCLB it has become increasingly clear that in most schools, achievement gaps are not closing.

## **Urban Schools and Achievement**

Despite costly reform efforts, urban middle schools in particular are struggling to find ways to raise the achievement of the largely poor, non-white and immigrant students they serve (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Noguera, 2003) and to create safe, orderly learning environments.

In California, this challenge is particularly entrenched in large urban school districts such as Los Angeles, Fresno, Oakland and San Diego, which all have a poor track record of meeting the educational needs of their diverse students. In these districts, achievement has historically been low, failure has been widespread, and the resources required to meet students' needs have often been lacking.

Indeed, NCLB has done little to change what Maeroff (1994) has described as “the dismal panorama of urban education,” and evidence that academic failure and high dropout rates remain largely unchanged is abundant (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007).

## **Suburban Schools: Same Story, Different Setting**

While the failure of urban public schools to meet achievement standards for traditionally low performing groups has been well known for decades, there is an increasing awareness that suburban schools are also failing to meet NCLB standards for diverse students (Ogbu & Davis, 2003).

In many suburban districts, even those with substantial resources and higher per-pupil expenditures, wide disparities in student achievement persist. There is little evidence that access to greater resources has produced greater equity in student outcomes (Hanushek, 1986; 1997; 2003).

NCLB's requirement that schools disaggregate test scores by race and other designated subgroups has exposed the fact that even schools with a track record of success overall are not faring so well in educating students from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds (Cowley and Meehan, 2003).

In such communities, NCLB has generated increased pressure and scrutiny over student achievement, and in many cases, prompted new debate over the factors contributing to student underachievement (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Even NCLB critics who object to the narrow focus of the policy because it relies almost exclusively on test scores to measure student learning find it hard to argue against the need for accountability in school districts where minority and low-income students are not achieving at levels commensurate with more privileged students.

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How well suburban schools do in meeting the needs of Black and Latino students is a matter of great concern for a number of reasons. While nationally there is a trend towards increased racial isolation in urban schools (Orfield & Lee, 2006; Massey, 1998), many suburban and historically White districts are experiencing increased diversity as Black and Latino families move into communities on the periphery of metropolitan centers.

For new minority residents, relocation to suburbia typically represents an opportunity to move up the socioeconomic ladder and take another step toward realizing the American Dream.

Gaining access to what parents hope will be superior schools for their children is, for many, a critical aspect of moving to the suburbs. Yet the failure of suburban public schools to meet the needs of these students, as suggested by the persistence of gaps in student achievement, is perhaps the clearest evidence that suburbia is not the refuge of opportunity many parents had hoped for.

Suburban school districts with a disproportionate number of low performing Black and Latino students are faced with both top-down and bottom-up pressure to find ways to address the achievement gap locally.

NCLB and state-level accountability measures are forcing district and school leaders to show evidence of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) in the achievement of their historically underachieving students. Simultaneously, these educators are faced with pressure from parents' groups and community organizations who

seek to hold districts accountable for the low performance of their students.

In the face of such pressures, the leadership in suburban districts cannot offer superficial solutions to the challenges facing their low performing minority students. Instead, suburban districts are compelled to develop new approaches to addressing the achievement gap and to demonstrate real evidence that the strategies they implement are working.

While the external and internal factors that contribute to the achievement gap are similar across most districts, there are clear differences in the policies and practices that districts have used and in the commitment they have shown to address disparities.

### **Success in the Middle**

Not surprisingly, some middle schools have made more progress and shown greater resolve in closing the achievement gap than others. This is particularly true for a small but significant number of sites that have shown it is possible to prevent the decline in achievement that so often occurs during this critical period of youth development (Education Trust, 2002).

At the 2008 New England Faculty Development Consortium Conference, I intend to draw upon the experiences of these successful schools to show that closing the achievement gap is not an exercise in futility; it is an attainable goal that is well within our reach.

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### **Message From The President Continued from page 1**

them with respect, and they responded by becoming more deserving of respect, and by succeeding—a wonderful cycle! Further, my interactions with students became more enjoyable when I kept both my mouth and my brain as student bashing-free zones.

Then I began to notice that both student bashing and its opposite, respect, seemed contagious. When colleagues traded student-bashing stories, the anecdotes took on lives of their own and were sometimes repeated for years. More worrisome was my perception that the attitudes were contagious, and that other faculty were getting drawn into the vortex of negativity. Conversely, when I talked respectfully with colleagues about students, I often overheard my words being repeated. Just like

when that graduate student confronted me so many years ago, when one person in a group interrupted the student bashing, the tone of the group often changed.

I don't recall the name of that graduate student who set me straight on student bashing 35 years ago, but I am eternally grateful to him. I hope he is a teacher. Whether he is or not, I think he has directly or indirectly promoted the success of generations of students.

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Chickering, A. W. and Gamson, Z. F. "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education." *AAHE Bulletin*, 1987, 39 (7), 3-7.

### **The NEFDC EXCHANGE**

Tom Thibodeau, New England Institute of Technology, Warwick, RI, Editor  
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The NEFDC EXCHANGE is published in the Fall and Spring of each academic year. Designed to inform the membership of the activities of the organization and the ideas of members, it depends upon member submissions. Submissions may be sent to either editor at [tthibodeau@neit.edu](mailto:tthibodeau@neit.edu) or [jalbert@middlebury.edu](mailto:jalbert@middlebury.edu). Materials in the newsletter are copyrighted by NEFDC, except as noted, and may be copied by members only for their use.

# Students' Own Goals: A Key to Success

**Barbara E. Walvoord**

**Professor Emerita, University of Notre Dame**

We've certainly heard enough about "learning goals" and "outcomes" in the past few years of the assessment movement. Many of us faculty have had to actually write down the learning goals we hold for our students. As a consultant to institutions on assessment, I have also read hundreds of other faculty members' learning goals. But recently, I have been reminded again of something I've learned over and over in my own years of college teaching and in the workshops on teaching and learning that I lead for faculty at many institutions: We are not the only ones in the classroom with goals.

Students' own goals are critical to the success of their learning. Marilla Svinicki, in her book about college student learning and motivation, draws on current research and theory to propose an amalgamated model: Motivation is based on the learner's goal orientation, including two aspects—whether the goal seems valuable, and whether the learner expects that the goal can be achieved (2004, p. 146).

If we are concerned about students' success and retention, we need rich conversations in our classrooms about our own and our students' goals. For example, a historian, John R. Breihan, and I have studied his general-education history class on "Western Civilization." He wanted students to learn to argue debatable issues, using historical information as data, and addressing counter-arguments. His course was structured to pose enduring human questions, such as "Why Arm? Why Fight?" (Walvoord and Breihan, 1990).

Students, on the other hand, often entered the Western Civilization course as a requirement to be gotten out of the way, or they came with a notion of history as the chronological recitation of true facts. "I am not in the habit of developing arguments," wrote one student in a reflection; "In high school we took the answers out of the book" (p. 102). Another student, interviewed after the course, recalled, "I remember going in there thinking, O.K., this is just...going to be basically all lecture and then I'm going to have to restate what he told me on an exam. But Dr. Breihan was saying, 'I'm not a history teacher; I'm a historian who teaches history.' And right there I knew the outlook that I had was WRONG! [As I looked through the course material] I remember thinking, this is going to be different than what I thought" (p. 99).

The diversity and complexity of faculty and student goals emerges in my study of teaching and learning in 533 introductory, general-education religion courses at both private and public institutions (2008). On a survey, 96% of the religion instructors chose a critical thinking course goal, but only 64% of students chose critical thinking. When asked to write anonymously in response to an open-ended question about their goals for the course, only 8% of students mentioned any aspect of critical thinking. Students' most frequently-mentioned goals were factual information and development of their own values and their religious beliefs and spiritual lives (2008, pp. 20-22).

Not only does this goal for spiritual development appear

in religion classes, but, according to a recent large national study, a majority of first-year college students "have high expectations for the role their institutions will play in their emotional and spiritual development. They place great value on their college enhancing their self-understanding, helping them develop personal values, and encouraging their expression of spirituality" (HERI, 2004, "Executive Summary," p. 1). Junior students reported, however, that faculty rarely offer the opportunity to address these issues. This is a more complicated issue than helping students move from regurgitation of facts to critical thinking goals. The spirituality study and similar studies have engendered a lively debate about whether, or how, college courses, especially in the liberal arts, should, or can, support students' interest in what are often called the "big questions" of life, death, and meaning. (See, for example, [www.TeagleFoundation.org](http://www.TeagleFoundation.org), and [www.ssrc.org](http://www.ssrc.org).) Here's where our students' goals are making us think hard about our own purposes and practices.

My point here is not to enter the debate about spirituality, but rather to point out that, in many disciplines, the professor, on the opening day, may lay out a path to Athens, but some students envision a track that heads to Chicago, and some to Jerusalem or Stonehenge. As we faculty members begin a new semester, one of the most important things we can do is to get out onto the table the real goals our students have for their own learning, whether it's addressing life's "big questions," regurgitating facts, or mastering their own versions of our discipline. Here are some strategies I've used myself or heard from other teachers in my research or in the workshops I lead.

## Role Model

The historian got his student's attention by presenting himself on the first day not as a lecturer and examiner, but as a practicing scholar whose goal was to help students learn to argue as historians argue. A sociologist uses the first class period to have student conduct a tiny sociological investiga-

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tion using aspects of their own classroom, as a way of showing them that the course's goal is to inquire about human social behavior. Some faculty members ask a previous student or two to come in and talk to the class about how the former students shaped and achieved their goals. Some faculty present a piece of their own published work and talk about how they entered the field, what they find compelling about their discipline, and how they generated that article or book.

### Course Materials

As the history student noted, the historian's course materials clearly communicated, even to a first-day skimmer, that the course was not about lectures and testing. On the syllabus appeared not just topics like "World Wars I and II," but large, bolded questions such as "Why Arm? Why Fight?" There were days for "debate" and "discussion." Assignments were labeled as "arguments." Nearly every class day, students were to write one-page assignments, answering questions that would help them evaluate historical evidence and shape arguments.

Another faculty member begins her syllabus not with the off-putting "objectives," but with a section, "What You Can Learn in this Course." A biologist who knows that some of her students will question the theory of evolution on religious grounds asks students to write anonymously their greatest fear about the course. She then leads the class in a discussion of the difference between, on the one hand, "learning" and "using" the scientific theory, and on the other hand, shaping their own personal religious beliefs. Finally she asks them to write, for themselves, course goals that will allow them to master course material, work within the scientific paradigm, and still honor their own religious communities, backgrounds, and convictions.

### Ask Students their Goals

Faculty can ask students, on the first day, to write anonymously in class, "What are your goals for learning in this course?" One instructor asks students what are their "hopes and apprehensions" about the course. The instructor can read these anonymous writings at home and, next class period, report and discuss what the class has said. Alternately, the instructor can redistribute the anonymous writings right there in the class, and ask several students to read the sheet of paper that came to them. One faculty member has students write their learning goals, then ball up the sheet of paper, close their eyes, and throw the ball to another part of the room. Then everyone opens their eyes and scrambles for one of the balls of paper. Anonymity thus preserved, blood flowing, and laughter generated, several students read aloud the papers they have retrieved, and discussion follows. Another faculty member asks students to exchange with a neighbor their names and their reasons for taking the course. She urges students to "go beyond 'it's a requirement.'" Then each person must introduce the neighbor to the class.

### Frequent Goal Checks

One faculty member asks students not only for goals, but also for a written plan by which the student expects to reach the goals. Plans contain items like the amount of time each week the student expects to devote to the course, specific actions such as reading assignments before class, attitudes the students hopes to maintain, and strategies the student expects to use when difficulties arise. At midterm, the faculty member asks students to review these early plans and write again: How well are you achieving your goals for the course? What changes are you making to your goals or your plan? What is your plan for the remainder of the semester? (for an example, see Walvoord, 2008, pp. 169-171).

### What Happens When We Attend to Students' Goals

My research has allowed me to document that our attention to students' goals can have strong effects on their learning. For example, the history student who had expected to regurgitate lecture material was forced from the very first day to re-examine her goals. She soon shaped a new goal: to learn to argue. With an incoming verbal SAT score below the class average, she struggled to learn how to shape a position, identify evidence, and construct arguments. As she drafted one of her argumentative essays, she jotted a goal for herself, "Keep in mind proving this." As she gained more success as a writer of arguments, she set a new goal: to participate in the in-class debates where students had to bring evidence and counter-argument to bear on the give-and-take or oral argument. She writes in her journal, "I need to develop more confidence in my ideas and to speak up in class...I am afraid of being criticized or not having enough evidence to back up my ideas." After several debates in which she is silent ("I again did not contribute much to class discussion"), she achieves this goal as well: "I finally did it!" In an interview several years later, just before she graduated summa cum laude and went on to law school, she reflected that the course had been "THE hardest course I ever had," that her writing had improved enormously, and that the course had "taught me how to think" (Walvoord and Breihan, 1990, pp. 136-141). She had come a long way from her incoming goal of memorizing lectured material and restating it on an exam.

The efforts of the 66 highly-effective religion faculty also caused students to change, develop, or clarify their very complex sets of goals. A student completing a "world religions" course writes that the course was "totally different from what I had expected...my perception of religion has changed dramatically" (Walvoord, 2008, p. 157). Another student: "I went into this course expecting to deepen my faith in my belief. However, that is not the way to look at it. I have learned that...you have to examine the world behind the text and the world of the text when interpreting the Bible" (pp. 74-75). Another student writes, "My primary goal is not to 'figure everything out' like I thought I would, but rather to get better at investigating these things on my own" (Walvoord, 2007, p. 5). Many students wrote about gaining the critical thinking skills their teachers emphasized, but also achieving the more private goals that their classes did not direct or dictate, but that students found deeply important: "I was truly fascinated by some other religious thoughts, such as Jainism and Confucianism. Also, I could reflect on myself as a Buddhist through this course." (p. 80) and "Through this course I have acquired the knowledge I need to think critically about the religious traditions of Judaism and Islam. Through this, though, I have gained better understanding of what my own beliefs are." (p. 66)

A liberal education teaches students not only how to fulfill our goals, but how to develop, enrich, and achieve their own. We do our best teaching when we build into our classes rich, ongoing discussion of goals for learning.

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# NEFDC 2008 Fall Conference

## Friday, November 14, 2008

### **“Accessing Academic Excellence: What Colleges Can Do to Promote Student Success”**



**Keynote Speaker:**  
**Pedro Noguera,**  
**Steinhardt School of Education**  
**at New York University**

Our Keynote speaker will be Pedro Noguera, a professor in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at New York University. An urban sociologist, Noguera’s scholarship and research focus on the ways in which schools are influenced by social and economic conditions in the urban environment. Noguera has served as an advisor and engaged in collaborative research with several large urban school districts throughout the United States. He has also done research on issues related to education and economic and social development in the Caribbean, Latin America and several other countries throughout the world. His most recent book is *The Trouble With Black Boys ... And Other Reflections on Race, Equity, and the Future of Public Education*, (Wiley, 2008)

# NEFDC 2009 Spring Conference

### **“Using Technology to Connect with Our Students”**

This conference is co-sponsored by OSHEAN, The Ocean State Higher Education Advanced Network and will be held at various locations throughout New England and connected via videoconferencing technology. Our keynote speaker will be Dr. Peter Doolittle from Virginia Tech.



**Dr. Peter Doolittle**  
**Associate Professor,**  
**Educational Psychology,**  
**Virginia Tech & Executive**  
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**Learning in Higher**  
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Peter Doolittle is an Associate Professor in Educational Psychology in the School of Education at Virginia Tech and Executive Editor of *The International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. Dr. Doolittle received his Ph.D. in Educational Psychology in 1995 from The Catholic University of America. His academic background includes teaching in K-12 and higher education, using traditional and online formats, across several subject areas including mathematics, computer science, statistics and educational psychology. He is an invited speaker nationally and internationally on learning, motivation and the educational usage of technology. Dr. Doolittle has published in *Social Studies Research and Practice*, *American Educational Research Association*, *International Journal of Mobile Learning and Organization*, *Journal of Vocational and Technical Education*, and *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia*. He is the recipient of the Phi Delta Kappa Innovative Teacher Award and the Teacher-as-Researcher Award for his work in constructing interactive educational psychology Web sites. Currently, his professional focus involves investigating learning efficacy and the development of metacognitive skills in mobile and multimedia learning environments, and synthesizing cognitivism, constructivism, and complexity theory within a framework that integrates educational theory into practice.



## Connecting With Others

There are two dominant national organizations—POD and NCSPOD--of people who do faculty development work. Both have excellent fall conferences, with many sessions appropriate for faculty members interested in professional development.

The Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network in Higher Education is primarily four-year college and university professionals. Link up with POD at [www.podnetwork.org](http://www.podnetwork.org). POD also has a very active and informative listserv.

The National Council for Staff, Program and Organizational Development is an affiliate council of the American Association of Community Colleges, and is primarily two-year college professionals. Link up with NCSPOD at [www.ncspod.org](http://www.ncspod.org).



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# WABASH COLLEGE

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### CONFERENCE PROPOSALS

Proposals are due on November 15, 2008 and the Early Bird registration deadline is January 30, 2009. See <http://www.wabash.edu/Sotl/> for more information.

### WWW.NEFD.C.ORG

Have you visited the NEFDC web site lately? It is maintained by Board member Keith Barker from the University of Connecticut. Information on the annual Fall and Spring Conferences, contact information for the board, membership forms, and related data are all available online. Take advantage of this valuable resource and bookmark us at [www.nefdc.org](http://www.nefdc.org)

# Student Engagement Equals Student Success: What Does Your Risk Continuum Look Like?

**Laura K.M. Donorfio, Ph.D.**  
**Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Studies**  
**University of Connecticut, Waterbury**

**Catherine Healy**  
**Instructional Designer, University of Connecticut, Storrs**

The construct of student engagement is becoming more than just educational rhetoric as more and more educators are advocating for student involvement as an essential aspect of meaningful learning. Engagement techniques have evolved as strategies for instructors to promote learning, involvement, and most importantly, student success. Reports by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and The Community College Student Report (CCSSE) have shown that a high level of student engagement increases learning and retention (NSSE, 2003; CCSSE, 2007). Engagement strategies promote the application of material by helping students to connect the information from the classroom to practice in the outside world, but students are not the only ones who benefit. Using engagement strategies benefits the students by providing them the opportunity to ask questions and practice skills, but it also benefits the instructors by affording them the opportunity to assess the students' understanding and remediate important points on a "real time" basis (Van Amburgh et al. 2008).

Use of engagement strategies is vital to student success because of its powerful impact on student learning (Kuh, 2007). But research continues to report that traditional lecture modes, in which professors talk and students listen, dominate college and university classrooms. Tinto (2002) states, "Learning is still very much a spectator sport in which faculty talk dominates and where few students actively participate" (p.1). Barriers to using engagement strategies in the classroom exist on many levels. Common barriers include limited class time, increased preparation time to modify traditional lectures, impact on student grading, impact on faculty evaluations, and the lack of needed resources. Perhaps the greatest single barrier of all is the "risk" associated with employing engagement strategies in the classroom. Bonwell & Eison (1991) identify many risks: "... that students will not participate, use higher-order thinking, or learn sufficient content, that faculty members will feel a loss of control, lack necessary skills, or be criticized for teaching in unorthodox ways" (p.3).

Supported by decades of research, engagement strategies themselves may also be thought of as existing on a continuum from low risk to high risk for both teachers and students (UD CTE, 2008). Such a continuum may include (but is not limited to) low risk strategies such as polling (show of hands), making eye contact, using student names, one-minute papers, brainstorming with post-it notes, well

structured question and answer sessions, making connections with concept maps, providing study guides, using humor, etc. High risk strategies may include using interactivity through PowerPoint presentations, clickers, creativity with papers, role playing, mock trials, asking students to present their work in class, asking students to relate outside events or activities to the subjects covered in class, group activities, speakers, field trips, field works, using email outside class to enhance discussions, asynchronous discussion tools (Blackboard), etc. This list, including all the moderate risk activities in-between, seems indefinite. For some, just adding the dimension of technology increases the associated risk.

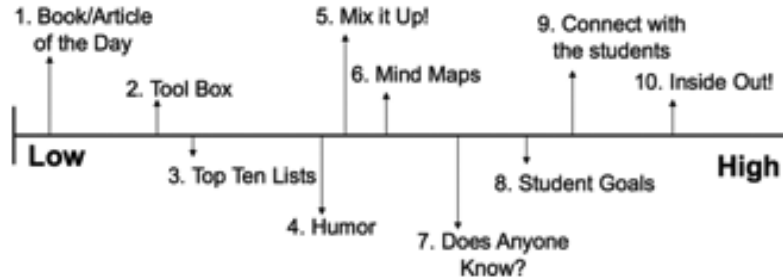
When I first began my post at the University of Connecticut four years ago, a fellow junior faculty member recommended that I utilize the services provided by our Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL). This is where I met Catherine Healy, an instructional design expert. As Cathy guided me through her knowledge of course design, she made me realize that I already do many classroom activities that engage students. What is interesting is that I was not even aware of what I was doing to engage students. The light went on—I finally made the formal connection between what I do in the classroom and how it actually engages the students. With Cathy's assistance, over the years I have developed an exhaustive list of engagement strategies that I now routinely use in the classroom. I have outlined below my "Top Ten" engagement strategies and where they fall on my risk continuum. My definition of risk encompasses both my comfort with the engagement strategy and the degree of comfort/discomfort it could pose for the students, such as how much they have to participate, how much they have to divulge of themselves, etc. I have included only those engagement strategies that have been successful for me, based on student feedback gained from anonymous surveys as well as small and large group discussions.

In order to engage students, educators must be adequately prepared with the techniques and strategies to help facilitate engagement. I encourage you to visit your institution's faculty development office, participate in an engagement workshop, and/or complete self-assessment tools to determine what engagement strategies fall within your comfort zone on your risk continuum. As you consider various engagement strategies, keep in mind that student learning and success depends primarily on what the

students do, rather than what the teacher does. You should also choose activities with which you feel comfortable. Your engagement strategies do not have to be high risk to be successful. You can be very effective using low risk

strategies as long as they are engaging. What comes into play is your ability to manage each strategy for maximum engagement with the students. So to close, let us ask you, what does your risk continuum look like?

### My Engagement Strategy Risk Continuum



<b>1. Book/Article of the Day</b>	Each class session I choose one or two books (classic or current) from my bookshelf related to the topic at hand. I discuss why I like the book, how it relates to the class topic, and then I pass the book around so they can individually thumb through contents. I also allow them to borrow the book if they would like to further delve into the subject matter. By doing this I believe I make "real" the application of course content to outside practice. Also, if I come across an article or current media piece that relates to class, I bring this into class and do the same. It is amazing that after 3-4 weeks, students are bringing in relevant books and articles for a real "exchange" experience.
<b>2. Tool Box</b>	I provide many handouts in the classes I teach. Cathy and I came up with the idea of providing each student with a plastic folder with a securing string around it to house all of the handouts. Over the years I noticed students would lose and misplace their handouts. This provides a tangible way to organize their material. Students love it and many expect that no matter what class they are taking with me they will get a "toolbox" for that class!
<b>3. Top Ten Lists</b>	The first time I presented a top ten list I was pleasantly surprised. I was excited about the idea, modeling it somewhat after the late night show and all the suspense that goes along with the build up to number one. The next class I went in without a top ten and the students asked me where the next top ten list was. They raved about it. When I asked what they liked about a top ten list, they said it put us all on the same page with respect to what I think are the most important points and that it felt like the information was more concrete and tangible. It provided them with structure and then gave us an opportunity to discuss what top ten was the most significant learning for them.
<b>4. Humor</b>	Humor captures attention, is memorable, and can relieve tension. I define humor as any event that elicits a smile or laugh but it is not limited to jokes or humorous stories. Humor can include props, puns, short stories, anecdotes, media clips, or cartoons. It can be anything that creates a positive feeling in the students. I believe that appropriate use of humor can increase student attention and focus by creating a more open atmosphere. After announcements, and answering any questions that students may have from the previous week, I formally begin each class lecture with a "Humor of the day" slide. It gets the class settled and is a great icebreaker. Research shows that students report they retain more information from humorous lectures and class discussions (Berk, 2000). Don't be afraid to be funny!
<b>5. Mix it Up!</b>	You can't expect to keep student's attention for an entire class by only lecturing. You can provide variety without sacrificing structure. Depending on the length of my class, I typically divide it up into 2-4 activities, sometimes more depending on their duration. A typical 90-minute class of mine would include lecture, group work, hands-on activity, video or video clip or speaker; in addition to the way I present the class material (e.g., humor, top ten lists, etc.). I tend to leave my class format flexible in case something comes up within the class that I can capitalize on (i.e., student brings in a book to share, asks a question that spawns debate). I have learned over the years to leave extra time in case this happens, with back-up activities, rather than plowing through at all costs and allowing no participation because I have "X" content to cover. This is risky because sometimes you choose an activity that is not successful, so you have to be able to pick yourself and the students back up and positively get through the remainder of the class. Mixing it Up! helps guard against engagement strategies becoming rote. Research does show that improved engagement does wane over time.

*Continued on page 10*

<p><b>6. Mind Maps</b></p>	<p>A mind map is my version of a much-utilized tool called concept mapping. Student's construct mind maps by connecting individual terms by lines, which illustrate the relationship between ideas, concepts, terms, etc. I like calling it a mind map because I want the students to understand that I am very interested in what is going on in their minds. I most commonly use this exercise after attending a field trip with the class. This is a great way to debrief about where we went and what we learned. If the subject material is very sensitive, I will have the students not include their names, collect all the mind maps and then pass them back out in a shuffled order so student's can read the responses of others. Sometimes an overall mind map is created on the board, including all the student's individual responses.</p>
<p><b>7. Does Anyone Know?</b></p>	<p>When a student asks a question, instead of answering it myself, I open it up to the class. While this is risky, never knowing where the conversation will go, students appreciate the opportunity and take it very seriously. Of course the size of the class matters and some rapport must be built up with the class before this can feel and be successful, but once this level of comfort is built, lectures start to feel like conversations. If no one genuinely knows the answer, sometimes I make it an assignment for everyone to research the answer for the next class discussion. Believe it or not, it works!</p>
<p><b>8. Student Goals</b></p>	<p>Helping students identify what they want to get out of a course they take with me is a time intensive activity but well worth it at the end of the semester. The very first day of class I hand out a personal background sheet, asking students to tell me a little bit about themselves and to list three objectives they hope to accomplish by taking my class. I review the sheets and make comments and hand them back midway through the course. I have them reread what they originally wanted to get out of the class and consider if and how this has changed. This tends to be a risky exercise because most students have never been asked to do this and it is difficult for them. Also, reframing those responses that say "for course credit" or "to graduate" requires joint action on both our parts. The class session before the final, I hand back the revised objective sheets once again and have a class discussion on what they thought they would get out of the class, what they actually did, and suggestions for future classes.</p>
<p><b>9. Connect with the Students</b></p>	<p>Engagement needs to exist outside of the classroom and beyond class time. One way to do this is to use a course management tool such as Blackboard so students can respond to each other's comments with your supervision and input. Another way to connect with the students is by making yourself accessible via office hours, phone contact, and email. By opening these doors of communication, you create a virtual classroom. Connecting with the students does take more time and energy. It also means that you have to be seen by students as being "approachable."</p>
<p><b>10. Inside Out!</b></p>	<p>Marrying up practical application with class theory and material is very important in my philosophy of classroom engagement. A strategy I use to do this is what I have coined, "bringing the inside out and the outside in," encompassing field trips and speakers. I feel this is the riskiest engagement strategy because you have no control over what a speaker might say or do or what might happen on a field trip. For instance, I teach a death and dying course, so I have the students go on a field trip to a funeral home. For some students this is a daunting task. Much time is spent with students making sure they are comfortable prior to going and when we return. This has proved to be very successful in engaging students in the topic area.</p>

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# Storytelling Facilitates Natural Learning: A Teaching Strategy

**Karen L. St.Clair**  
**Emerson College**

Here is a personal story about a story. In the motion picture, *Good Will Hunting* (Van Sant, 1997), Skylar, a university student declines an invitation to go out with the male lead, Will Hunting, because she has to solve a chemistry problem. Will Hunting, a genius, merely glances at the problem and has it in memory. He leaves her, quickly solves the problem, and returns to her with the solution. Her response has stuck with me since I saw the film. She responds in her British accent, "But, I've got to learn this." She does not say she has to memorize it. At that time, I was teaching psychology at a liberal arts college. My reaction was, "Why can't my students be like she is? Why can't they be inclined to learn, rather than memorize?" I was not taking responsibility for their learning, but I was not helping matters, either. Several years later I began exploring the value of reflection and storytelling as pedagogical techniques. The *Good Will Hunting* story came back to me when I discovered the connection between storytelling and the biological basis for learning. Being a skeptical psychologist, having a biological basis was important to me.

How can storytelling facilitate learning? Abrahamson (1998) noted that because storytelling enables people to better understand one another through concrete examples, telling stories to students can enhance the intellectual process. Willingham (2004) also focused on telling stories to students, and described a story's characteristics that contribute to learning: causality, conflict, complications, and character. Barrett (2005) wrote about how in reflective portfolios student learning is enhanced by telling their own stories. She highlighted Kolb's (1984) learning cycle, which is "based on the belief that deep learning . . . comes from a sequence of experience, reflection, abstraction, and active testing" (pp. 19-20). She also highlighted Zull's (2002) biological explanation of Kolb's learning cycle. Zull compared the brain's functioning to Kolb's cycle by identifying the brain structures that sense information (experience), integrate the information with what is already in memory (reflection), hypothesize about that new information (abstraction), and act on it (active testing). Feedback to the sensory system occurs and the cycle begins again. The cycle, with not inconsequential emotional input from brain structures, results in natural changes in the brain. Zull equates those changes to learning. Taylor (2006) viewed students' writing about themselves (through narrative, journaling, autobiography, and writing-to-learn) as triggers for the reflection and integration steps in Kolb's and Zull's learning cycles. The potential for what Taylor termed transformational and non-veridical learning (learning that involves more than one answer to a question) is heightened.

What does the *Good Will Hunting* story have to do with teaching? Follow along through the cycle. When you read the story summary, sensory information is taken in. Because

there are familiar elements to the story, you reflect about your related stories and make connections to what is in memory. Reflect now about whether or not you have had students like the Skylar, or about other elements of the story can you relate to. The next cycle step is to hypothesize, or manipulate what is already in memory to create new mental arrangements. This could entail making plans for the future. Sometimes the hypothesizing can come much later, as it did for me. Try hypothesizing about how knowledge of the natural learning cycle could guide you toward incorporating storytelling to facilitate learning. For your next topic, recall a personal story that could be told to set the stage for your students to recall their own personal stories. The next step is action, which includes talking, writing, or otherwise testing hypotheses. Tell your story and observe what happens. I tested my idea that a personal story would trigger storytelling amongst my students. Students responded with stories from their lives, and they described and applied psychological concepts more capably. This feedback supported my hypothesis and I continued to use storytelling.

Try using a story to provide sensory information for your students. Provided it has familiarity, they will reflect. Allow your students to tell or write about their own personal stories about the topic. Then, encourage them to hypothesize about the question at hand. Facilitate their hypothesis testing. Point out the feedback and watch the cycle begin again. I admit that *Good Will Hunting* is merely a story. But, it led to discovering that there is a biological basis for facilitating learning through personal storytelling.

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## A Call for Graduate Student Involvement

**Molly Letsch**  
**Graduate Student, University of Connecticut**

I first heard about the New England Faculty Development Consortium when I found out the board was looking for a graduate student liaison. I am not studying learning, and I am not in an education department, but I soon hope to be an educator. As a doctoral student in a research driven field, NEFDC, and similar organizations, were just not on my radar. At the suggestion of a professor at the UConn Institute for Teaching and Learning I am now involved with NEFDC and amazed by the amount of local and national organizations that focus on helping faculty develop strong teaching practices.

Organizations like NEFDC that specialize in the development and improvement of teaching and learning have a lot to offer graduate students. By joining a community that is focused on pedagogy, graduate students are compelled to start developing their own teaching strategies early. Having exposure to teaching and learning theory, as well as practical ideas and solutions, can give graduate students more

confidence in their teaching ability as they transition to faculty positions. Confidence and a known support system can make all the difference in becoming a capable instructor right off the bat.

I also believe graduate students have a lot to offer NEFDC. Graduate students are the transition point from students to professors. For many of us the undergraduate experience is only a year or two behind us, and full time teaching hopefully only a year or two away. The insight gained from the transition between being a full time student and a full time professor is currently an under utilized resource in NEFDC. As graduate students, we can look at our relatively recent undergraduate experiences from the new position as the instructor. This insight will add a valuable new perspective to the consortium's conversation.

I would like to ask everyone to encourage at least one graduate student to get involved with our organization. Both graduate students and NEFDC have a lot to gain.

## The Not-So Dichotomous Relationship Between Student Self-Regulation and Teacher Evaluation

**Dana (Dean) Simpson**  
**Visiting Assistant Professor of Spanish, Clark University, Worcester, MA**

I believe that students that take control of their own learning (self-regulation) have a richer and more significant learning experience. For the teachers/instructors/professors it creates a conundrum because we ask ourselves how we are supposed to evaluate the students that do this. If the students regulate their own learning, what is our role as mentors and how do we regulate their regulation? How do we evaluate them? Is this more work for us than the traditional "dissemination-integration-regurgitation" paradigm? Does this really measure skill, knowledge and potential?

Being innovative requires stepping into something new. Some of us have methodologies we prefer and to which we adhere, some of us have fossilized certain habits with which we are familiar, and some of us simply don't have any new ideas (but may be in the market for them). We work with the system that best suits our capacity to educate.

But we must take into consideration that students need to create a system that best suits their capacity to learn. Not to call us "old dogs", but the students are always new. As the only

thing that remains constant is change itself, with the years "Student" becomes "student" as we move from subject to object. Perhaps the only way to stay "in subject" is to give more power to the students.

I had a science teacher in prep school that "went by the book". The rumor was that he followed a notebook he put together, something like a self-written Bible, extracting cookie-cutter lesson plans year after year. Although he was methodical and precise in his approach (as he supposedly periodically eliminated and annotated systems and practices that best worked for him) it was degrading for me to think that I was object. I always asked myself what would happen if that notebook were to disappear. It was basic understanding that "if I do such and such I will get x grade", which is pitifully, in my opinion, a vat into which much our academic talent and direction has thrust itself. Learning as a means and not an end may be idealistic, but for many liberal arts was once (and still is for some) relished as a Swedish massage on the cerebral cortex.

To get to the center of the problem have the students ask

themselves these basic questions - 1) What have I learned?; 2) What do I like about what I have learned?; What do I not understand?; and 4) How can I find out what I don't understand? - helps them orient themselves in new terrain. We as educators should guide them in this process. How?

There are many ways that students can self-regulate their learning and ways that we can help them in this process. We evaluate them when we give them tests, when they write papers, when they give presentations, etc., but try, once a week at the end of class, giving the students a two-minute essay that address these questions listed above. It's a diagnostic for us to see where we need to go next and it summarizes for them what was learned, liked and labeled. Take them home, read them, ponder their complexities and toss them. It's an implicit suggestion/complaint box for the students and a explicit PR move on your part.

Another idea is to have student write "Reflections". I do this in some language classes I teach. Instead of having them write three 3-4 page papers over the semester I have them write ten or so "Reflections" based on anything they have prepared for that day (they can't write on a topic/text/ subject we have discussed in class). It serves many purposes: 1) it's less intimidating to the students knowing they can sit down and free-write 2) it prepares them for the days class discussion 3) it serves as a diagnostic for me to incrementally rate their understanding and it is a diagnostic for them to this same end 4) it gives more opportunity for informal in-class peer editing 4) it leaves the option for them to "reflect" on their views, opinions and concerns about the subject, assignment or process 5) it serves as a "toolkit" study guide for the students come

**The open-ended nature of theses and dissertations becomes a convenient excuse for some students to procrastinate.**

test time 6) it serves as a portal of communication between needs and objectives so I can give them more feedback. The student feels more as a subject, in both the figurative and traditional meanings of the word, as I connect more with them and I serve their needs.

Continual evaluation, self-controlled learning, constant feedback – they all seem like they would increase our work load. Multiply the bread. Here are a few examples of what I do:

- Peer correcting. I give a pop-quiz of four or five questions with one-word responses, I have the students switch papers with their neighbor, I give the answers then I ask all that got five to raise their hands and then all that got four, and write down their names with an "A" or "B" next to it. Those that did well get the cherry and everyone comes prepared the next day.

- Universal feedback. When students give evaluations I ask everyone in the class to evaluate them (with a key of what to look for). At the end of the student presentation everyone passes the evaluations to me, I look at them, then pass them all to the presenter. This way 1) everyone is responsible 2) everyone pays attention 3) the presenter looks less at me 4) things are seen I missed 4) people learn that their opinion is valid 5) the presenter gets more out of his/ her efforts.

- Group evaluations. One team evaluates another. This stimulates collaborative learning. This can be done in Project-Based Learning or Problem-Based Learning.

- Peer review. Students read each others papers and give feedback on content, organization, thesis, tone and grammar.

- Project-Based Learning. In groups let students design, research and present a subject that interests them.

- Student designed tests. I have let students design their own final exams (in groups). I have had them do group research papers, group presentations, design and teach a class, have a round table discussion with me, make short films, design group oral exams, etc.

- Assign semester-long "study-buddies". Students can call upon, confide in, lean on, and support one another in the learning process.

The point is not to create less work for us, but with a bit of thought, variety and creativity we pass the responsibility on to the students. They learn from one another, they "learn to learn" and they keep an eye on how they are doing and where they are going. Eventually they regulate the processes and we oversee the system. We facilitate their learning experience.

With the students as self-regulators and us as facilitators I believe that students become more interested in what they are learning, that they feel that they are valued as autodidacts and that our innovations and flexibility shows them that they are responsible. By collaborating, reflecting, evaluating and communicating, the real skill set that they will take with them when they graduate – competencies for life – will show how their educational experience is anything but the object of a prefab industrial production-rate cookie-cutter. Real food for thought.

**Susan Johns**  
**Saint Joseph College**

Increasing student retention in our institutions is a high priority for all. Institutions of higher education facilitate that goal by providing the necessary supports for student success within the college community and in college classrooms. The trick for professors is to provide those supports without undermining the rigor of our programs or minimizing the development of independent critical thinking alumnae. Multiple intelligences theory and generalizations from brain research can be the scaffold or bridge that can facilitate student success.

### **Brain Research**

Brain research has provided a couple of general tenets that help frame teaching. One of those is that information will be retained in long-term memory only when it makes sense and has meaning for the learner (Sousa, 2006). The question then becomes how to present material, known and loved by professors, in such a way as to make it sensible to the fledgling learner – what are the ingredients necessary for completion of that process?

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### **Time**

The first ingredient is time. Material is generally processed in short term memory for 5 – 20 seconds and in working memory for only 20 -25 minutes. Following the external attention which students give to new ideas there must be internal thinking or processing time. Continued exposure to external instruction will be counterproductive and will not facilitate the opportunity for students to make sense and provide meaning for complex material. Therefore instructional strategies must focus student attention on the material actively for periods of time and then reflectively so that the learner can process the information long enough to make it meaningful and sensible (Jensen, 1998).

### **Prior Learning**

Another component which is needed for processing information into long-term memory storage is prior learning. All learning which becomes sensible and meaningful connects to learning already stored in long-term memory.

Bits of information, factoids and partial memories do not fit the criteria of making sense and having meaning and have little value except when playing games such as trivial pursuit or for making small talk around the water cooler. Information that extends previous knowledge or helps students view their understandings, beliefs and theories in new ways becomes a part of their intellectual being.

### **Emotion**

A final generalization that can be used as an ingredient for student learning and resulting student success is emotion. Jensen (1998) states, “Emotions drive the threesome of attention, meaning, and memory” (p. 94).

Therefore, the information in long term storage that has had emotion attached to it will be much easier for the student to retrieve. Wolfe (2001) warns, “Emotion is a double-edged sword, with the ability to enhance learning or impede it” (p. 111). If the emotion is threatening the brain will downshift and no learning will take place. When negative memories do occur the attached knowledge is powerful and is easier to recall than positive emotional learning (Sousa, 2006). However, even though negative learning is easiest to recall, choosing to extend that knowledge is less likely to occur. On the other hand, extending or investigating knowledge with positive emotional connotations is likely. Jensen (1998) notes, “It [emotion] becomes the weight to all our thoughts, biases, ideas, and arguments” (p. 74).

Knowing that these three ingredients are necessary for long-term memory storage helps frame instruction. However, multiple intelligences theory gives a lens for developing instructional strategies which will engage students for extended periods of time, connect to prior learning and generally create positive emotional memories.

### **Multiple Intelligences Theory**

Howard Gardner first published his theory of multiple intelligences in *Frames of Mind* (1983). The theory purports that individuals have 8 various intelligences or ways of processing and knowing information. His work has been embraced by public schools Pre K – 12 across the country which means that many students in higher educational institutions have been taught using this theory (whether they know it or not). Two of these intelligences, verbal linguistic and logical mathematical have been the mainstays of instruction in most college classrooms for generations. However the other intelligence types (e.g. musical, visual spatial, bodily kinesthetic, naturalist, intrapersonal, and interpersonal) are usually found only in content specific classrooms. This lack of variety in instruction causes situations in which students’ needs are not met and student’s ability to succeed are marginalized.

The rest of this article will give some strategies for use in classrooms that use all intelligence types.

### **Verbal Linguistic Intelligence**

The verbal linguistic intelligence type focuses on the use and understanding of words. This is the bread and butter of any college classroom. Professors lecture, students question, and answers are given. Sometimes technological sources are used in the classroom which involve reading or note taking. All of these activities are important and useful instructional approaches however when students are given the opportunity to create the questions and initiate the discussions the level of engagement and accountability increases. It is much easier to assess gaps in learning and misunderstanding in student initiated scenarios which provides the opportunity to scaffold the learning in an effort to support student success.

### **Logical Mathematical Intelligence**

This intelligence type is also found in college classrooms across the campus. Professors ask questions and expect answers based on logic and reason. Sequential thinking is expected and valued whether it be in a science, math, English or history classroom. However, using the processes of science in math in other classrooms can be beneficial to the logical mathematical learner. Students can create theorems or formulae for the actions of fictional or historical characters or events which describe relationships and connections in ways that are insightful, evaluative and creative. As students describe these connections their thinking becomes visible and support for their learning deficiencies can be facilitated.

### **Musical Intelligence**

Everyone seems to enjoy music but some of our students think in terms of music and learn better when they can use that love of music in their learning. Having students play their musical instruments or sing to demonstrate learning may not be practical or beneficial but having students related their learning to established musical genres or songs can be engaging and useful. Having students find music that describes a philosophy, a theme in literature, a historical period, a fictional or historical character, a mathematical or scientific process or theory will engage students in analysis and evaluation of their understanding of those concepts. When students give justification of their choices their thinking is revealed and misconceptions are uncovered. This provides the opportunity to repair misinformation or misconceptions.

### **Bodily Kinesthetic Intelligence**

Bodily kinesthetic intelligence includes all types of movement. It can be whole body movement such as a dance, dramatization or role playing and involve fine motor muscles in the use of manipulatives. Dancing in classes other than in that content area will probably not occur. However, analyzing a dance or dances presented through a video could provide a backdrop for discussion on a variety of topics including the relationship between historical events, fictional and historical characters, connections between philosophical theories, descriptions of biological systems or the evolution of scientific eras.

### **Naturalist Intelligence**

The naturalist intelligence focuses on the natural world but specifically environmental issues. Use of this intelligence comes naturally to the sciences but also easily crosses over into the world of political science and the study of human systems. But students with a strong naturalist intelligence will do well when given the opportunity to investigate the impact of war on the natural world and environment, impact of fictional and historical figures on the natural world, philosophical viewpoints on environmental issues, changing views on animal rights, and the impact of economic systems on environmental systems.

### **Personal Intelligences**

The personal intelligences are intra (knowledge of self) and inter (knowledge of others). The second of these two intelligences is employed throughout college classrooms through group assignments, discussion groups, online discussions, and other group activities. The intra-personal intelligence is not so readily used. This intelligence type requires students to be self-aware. Use of reflection in classrooms would facilitate student self-learning. Having students answer questions such as; How did I learn this? What connections did I make to other learning? What made me uncomfortable in this learning situation? What was comfortable? How did I interact with others? What areas are growth areas for me?

Asking and answering these types of questions will help students know themselves and will give them information they need to set goals. As they become more knowledgeable about themselves and reach internal goals they will become more confident in their abilities which will increase the likelihood of their success.

### **Conclusion**

The goal of higher education institutions is to graduate students from our programs who have fulfilled our rigorous requirements and who are equipped for responsible citizenship. This article has been a short synopsis of some elements of brain research and the use of multiple intelligences which can aid in the development of instructional strategies which engage our students and facilitate their learning. It is hoped that this article will provide a lens by which to shift, just a little, the way instruction occurs in a college classroom. Engaged students whose learning needs are met will become more successful. Their success will transfer to the success of the institution as successful students will be more apt to graduate from our programs.

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The seventeen members of the Board of the NEFDC serve staggered three-year terms. Board Members are available for and welcome opportunities to meet and consult with members of the NEFDC and others who are interested in faculty development. We welcome nominations and self-nominations for seats on the Board.

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