This is the Weekly Reflection podcast from Saint Louis University’s Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning. Each week, we focus on a topic that fits with our theme for the 2012-2013 academic year, Engaging All Learners. Each reflection loosely follows the five-part Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation). The goal of this podcast is to provide an avenue into a space for thoughtful reflection on complex issues, rather than to provide answers to these issues.

Week 14: Engaging All Learners during Office Hours

Context:
It is nearing the end of the semester and Kaitlin has been studying for an upcoming final exam. She realizes that she has several questions about the material, and just generally needs reassurance that she is on the right track with the ways she is studying and thinking about the exam itself. She plans to stay after class to talk with her professor, but when class is over, there are several other students waiting to ask questions as well. As Kaitlin walks back to her room, she bumps into a friend and mentions her predicament. The friend suggests that Kaitlin go visit her professor during his office hours, but she is not so sure about this plan. Not only does she not want to bother her professor, but also she does not really know where his office is.

Experience:
We often take for granted that students understand parts of academic culture that they do not. While we sit through office hours grading or doing research wondering why more students do not take advantage of that time, students are misunderstanding or avoiding office hours for a multitude of reasons. What we know, however, is that students who use time away from class to speak to their professors, to ask questions and get reassurance, tend to be much more successful academically. During this individualized time, professors are better able to answer questions specifically and discuss issues more thoroughly. We have an opportunity to know students differently, and are better equipped to help students strategize their studying and know which areas are more difficult, or even more interesting to specific students. Office hours can be a powerful tool to know how each student learns, and each student’s needs, while giving the course content a more personal feel.

Reflection:
(Take some time to consider the following prompts. You may find it helpful to write or sketch your thoughts.)

Do students visit you during office hours or other times outside of class? Which students tend to visit your office more often? Which students do you rarely see in your office? How do you view office hours? Do you encourage students to stop by your office, or do you make it clear that they should talk to a TA first? What are some instances in which you have seen your office hours be a productive time for teaching and learning?

Action:
Create a plan in which every student in at least one of your classes will visit your office once during the first several weeks of the term. Perhaps these are three-minute individual meetings, or perhaps they are 15-minute small group meetings. They can center around a lesson or assignment from the course, or can use just use a question or two as the basis for the meeting. The purpose is to create an opportunity to find your office, and for students to become more comfortable with using designated office hours.
Evaluation:
(The following questions are meant to be used at a later time after you have completed the Action, but may be used as a way to shape the action as well. It may be helpful to write or sketch your responses.)

With what intentions did you redesign or create the learning experience? How did those intentions present in the learning experience? Did the experience change the ways you see teaching, learning or the course?

How do you know if the change made a difference in student learning? For which students did the change make the most difference? Are there negatives for any students associated with the change you made?

What will you do next?

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Thank you for participating in this week’s reflection.

The next reflection will be posted on Friday, December 14th. All reflections will be archived for future use. For more information on this week’s topic, CTTL services, programs, or events please consult the website at http://slu.edu/ctl.