

## MOTIVATING YOUR STUDENTS

*This handout will help you motivate your students. For more information on student motivation please visit KOLT in SCI Z40.*

"Research on learning tells us that students are most motivated when (1) they value what they are learning and (2) when they believe they can be successful learning new or unfamiliar material." (McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning, Princeton University)

### How can I make my students value what they are learning?

- Discuss your personal enthusiasm for the topic: Why are your discipline's ways of thinking important? How has your knowledge of this area helped you to answer creative and interesting questions?
- Demonstrate the relevance of the content. For example:
  - (1) Explain how your course allows for a finer appreciation of life. How can we appreciate music differently after studying tempo, texture and harmony? How can we better understand our personal relationships after studying sociology?
  - (2) Apply course content to real world situations. Have students evaluate the latest diet trends given their new knowledge of cellular metabolism. Have students apply principles of physics and engineering to the ongoing Marmaray Project in Turkey.
  - (3) Apply course content to problems encountered in different fields. For example, inform students interested in law, marketing or international relations how your psychology class provides insight into the roots of human behavior.
  - (4) Explain how your course provides practical skills required by the job market. For example:
    - Show videos capturing professionals in work settings using skills and knowledge taught in your course.
    - Inform your English students of how writing skills are crucial for communicating decisions in the world of business. Educate your philosophy students about the need for critical thinking skills when engaging political or legal discourse.
- Reduce student complacency by employing a range of teaching techniques, including audio-visual presentations, group discussions, in-class writing assignments, and kinesthetic activities. Kinesthetic activities allow students to move around the classroom and learn through hands-on participation (e.g., role plays, presentations and debates).

### How can I make my students feel confident of success?

- Make course requirements and grading criteria absolutely clear. Clear expectations increase student confidence.
- Provide student feedback. Highlight success and improvement whenever possible. If giving negative feedback, be specific and make clear suggestions. Sensitively phrase your comments.
- Sequence course content so assignments become progressively more difficult. Early success will give students confidence to tackle more challenging problems later in the semester.
- Show personal interest in each student's success. Send personal emails to students positively commenting on their work. After class discussion, acknowledge all contributors individually.
- Promote group work and student collaboration over competition.
- Help students see success as a product of effort and failure as a learning opportunity.



### This handout is adapted from the following sources:

- The McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning, Princeton University.  
<http://www.princeton.edu/mcgraw/>
- (WPI) Worcester Polytechnic Institute's Academic Technology Center.  
<http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/ATC/Collaboratory/Idea/motivate.html>
- Svinicki, Marilla D. Learning and Motivation in the Postsecondary Classroom. Anker Publishing Company. 2004.
- Davis, B. G., Tools For Teaching, 1st edition, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993, pp.193-201.