

# THE ASSESSMENT CHRONICLES

OF LANEY COLLEGE

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## MOTIVATING STUDENTS TO LEARN

by David Mitchell

Every instructor who has taught more than two weeks has encountered students who lack motivation to participate in class and/or to complete required assignments. “Why are these students even taking my class?” we ask ourselves when students fail to engage or perform. Here’s a more important question we ask ourselves: “What can I do to motivate students to participate more eagerly in my class at all levels?” In order to answer this second question, it may help to look at why some students aren’t motivated to learn and what instructors can do to foster motivation.

One reason students may not be motivated is because they don’t see value in the task they’re assigned, whether it be participating in a group discussion, writing an essay or giving a presentation. If students don’t consider the work we give them valuable, they may end up doing the minimum to get by—their hearts and minds just won’t be in the task. We instructors can help students be aware of how valuable the assignment is by telling them why we’re giving them the assignment in the first place. What are our goals for them in this assignment? What are the skills or knowledge our students will gain by completing this task? How is this assignment related to the Student Learning Outcomes for the course? Telling students right from the start our reasons for giving them that five-page essay to write and what they’ll learn or gain by writing it, and then reminding them of our reasons and expectations throughout the assignment will help keep them focused and motivated to succeed.

A second reason students may not be motivated in our classes is they lack confidence in their abilities, and consequently, don’t expect to succeed. As we know, a lot of our students at Laney come to us underprepared for college-level work. These students are here, so obviously they see some value in going to college, but they may feel inadequate or even lost when trying to complete assignments. They might make excuses about why they’re not working hard, deny having difficulties or pretend to understand an assignment to cover up the fact that they don’t know how to approach it. So how can we set up conditions for these students who don’t think they can do the work to succeed? One way to help them is to be very clear about our expectations and requirements. Giving students (especially those who lack confidence or

college experience) written, easy-to-follow, step-by-step instructions on how to complete an assignment will go a long way in helping students feel that they can actually do it. In addition, monitoring and giving feedback to these students each step of the assignment helps ensure that the students will get the most out of their work and be successful. Feedback can include oral feedback, written feedback, a rubric, or a tutor to help students with a step in the assignment.

Motivating students can be difficult, but understanding the complexities that underlie motivation can help us create conditions in our classes that will make more of our students eager to learn.

*Adapted from "Student Engagement Techniques", E. Barkley*

## MOTIVATING INSTRUCTORS TO ASSESS

by David Mitchell

Cheli and I find that motivating instructors to participate in the assessment process can be just as difficult as motivating our students to participate in our classes. As you're probably aware, instructors are required to assess Student Learning Outcomes for their courses, but some instructors don't. There are probably two main reasons instructors don't assess their SLOs: they don't see the benefits of doing so and/or they feel it's so complicated, difficult or time-consuming that they won't succeed. We're here to change your mind about this!

### Benefits of Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

- Faculty discuss what, why and how they teach, and what their standards are
- Faculty better understand how their courses fit into the whole program and how their course contributes to student success after students finish the course
- Instructors see what students understand and what they don't so they can modify the course and/or their teaching
- Students get a clear understanding of course goals so they know what to focus their energies on
- Students get valuable feedback on their work so they can improve
- Laney College keeps its accreditation

### Assessing SLOs isn't that Demanding

- Choose an SLO for your course and an assessment tool (an exam, an essay, a presentation, a project) that would assess the SLO. *Note: You're probably already assessing your students, so now relate your assessment to an SLO.*
- Work with colleagues in your discipline who are teaching the same course to create assessment tools, grading rubrics, etc.
- Give the assessment to your students.
- Compile the results of your assessment.
- Discuss your results with your colleagues and make any appropriate changes to the course, materials, instruction or even the SLO.
- Record your findings in TaskStream. *Note: This is the easiest part because Cheli and I can sit down and help you with this.*

