

What can faculty do to help students succeed - 25 tips

Several faculty have expressed great interest in joining the Provost's War on Attrition, but are not sure what role they can play in helping students succeed, beyond the usual good teaching and holding office hours. This paper is an attempt to give practical tips on how faculty can help students succeed and stay in the university.

Personal challenges

1. Money problems, self-destructive alcohol use, and homesickness are the biggest challenges our entering students face in the campus environment. Before class, you may have opportunity to encourage students by acknowledging these issues, and suggesting positive ways to overcome them. Or you can also make available a list of campus resources they can turn to. Just your acknowledgment of the issues may help these students to know they are not alone. We are preparing a web site with resources for undergraduate students for Spring term. In the meantime:
Counseling Center: www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/Counseling/
Resources for graduate students: www.research.uky.edu/gs/GradOrient.html
2. Notice if students miss multiple classes in the first two weeks, and report this through our Academic Alert system. The first two weeks of class are critical to student performance and success. Tell them that class attendance, sitting up at the front, and doing all assignments are the best indicators of student success in classes.
3. Make entering students aware of academic support services on campus:
 - a. The Study: www.uky.edu/UGS/study/
 - b. Math Resource Center: www.mathskeller.com/
 - c. Writing Center: www.uky.edu/AS/English/wc/
 - d. Research help in the library, the Hub at WT's: www.uky.edu/Libraries/lib.php?lib_id=17:
4. Tell students about on-campus events scheduled over weekends and encourage them to stay in Lexington to participate. The more they are engaged in meaningful activities on campus, the more likely they are to stay at UK and finish successfully.
5. Take a class visit on campus to an academically related venue or event: the art museum, Special Collections, the anthropology museum, the recital hall, or a lab. Many first generation college students have never seen these sites before. It will give them hands-on ownership of their campus.
6. Encourage students in your classes to work on campus if at all possible, even if it is a less prestigious job. Students who work on campus rather than off campus tend to stay at the university and do better in classes.

7. Be explicit about class projects that will entail time investments over the semester. Know that more than 75% of our entering students had to spend less than 5 hours on homework during their senior year in high school.
8. Say hello to students if you see them looking your way when you cross campus, even if you are not sure they are in your class. They probably know who you are, and they will remember the acknowledgement.
9. If a student does a great job, or improves substantially, please tell them so. Do so verbally and/or in writing (on a paper, via email etc.). Personal connection to a teacher is one of the best indicators for student retention.

Helping students control costs

10. Submit your book list through the official UK textbook order form. Do not add extra required texts in mid-semester unless absolutely necessary. These will always be more expensive. www.uky.edu/AuxServ/textbookinfo/
11. Be aware of the UK bookstore website. Check it for accuracy right before the semester starts. Students can order and hold books online; please encourage them to do so, so they can secure the cheapest editions.
www.bkstr.com/CategoryDisplay/10001-9604-16403-1?demoKey=d
12. If you require course packets, give the prepared packets to both the UK Bookstore and to Kennedy's, so that they will be priced competitively. (Kennedy's refuses to sell copies of the packets to the UK Bookstore for duplication.) Set the price at cost only – do not try to make a profit on these for yourself or your department. According to national experts, up to 80% of course packet content is available electronically through university libraries and other electronic sources. Using these will create substantial savings for your students. For example, we have a variety of full-text journal articles available on line through UK libraries:
www.uky.edu/Libraries/
13. Investigate whether your required text may be legally available online or in an electronic format. Indicate on your syllabus whether students may use this e-version in your class. Check with UK libraries to locate these resources. libraries:
www.uky.edu/Libraries/ Click on the databases and e-journals areas to find items available online.
14. Students are spending c. \$900 a year on textbooks. Determine whether your course actually needs to have the newest edition of the course textbook. If you can use any edition, or any edition within the last three years, it can mean substantial savings to your students. Encourage your department to check on all introductory course texts to see if multiple editions may be used. Often, these orders are on automatic pilot and the Bookstore will choose the newest and most expensive edition automatically.

15. Post your required texts for each department course on your website, complete with acceptable editions and ISBN numbers. Students may be able to purchase these before they get to UK.
16. If the publisher makes it possible, “unbundle” textbook-media packages if you do not plan to use all items in the bundle.

Academic Engagement:

17. This goes without saying: set high expectations from the outset, for yourself and the TAs and instructors you supervise. Model good academic behavior (e.g., come to class on time, be prepared, pass out detailed syllabi, do not waste the first class, make sure to return homework and tests in a timely fashion)
18. Get involved on the new all-campus Summer Reading starting with our fall 2009 cohort: We will start the publicity roll-out on this in a few weeks. Incoming students will be required to read Stephen McBride’s *The Color of Water: A Black Man’s Tribute to his White Mother* (1996). Read this book. Consider volunteering to lead a discussion on it with a small student group. If appropriate, consider including the book or parts of it in your syllabus next year. We would like this book to spark campus-wide discussion. We will be accepting your nominations for future summer readings as well.
19. Give a short entry survey/pre-test in the first week of class. Ask students to identify concerns about taking the class. This assessment will help you anticipate student challenges with your course.
20. Give students detailed feedback. Please submit your midterm grades on time. They will appear in the student’s “myUK” web page, and will be used by advisors for academic counseling.
21. Require more writing assignments to get students engaged with the work. According to the NSSE survey, UK students report having fewer pages of assigned writing than our benchmarks.

Provide and publicize proven high impact activities for each student in your degree programs. The more a project forces students into active engagement over time, the more likely that that student will have a meaningful academic experience. George Kuh has investigated which activities contribute the most to student success. He has also determined that minority students, first generation college goers, and students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to do one of these projects. We aim for students to have at least 2 high impact academic experiences during their careers at UK. Think about the high-impact offerings your department offers. Do you have some that are economically feasible for poorer students who must work during the year and summers?

When you redesign your degree curriculum to align with the proposed new Gen Ed requirements, consider including one of the high impact activities.

These activities are:

- Living Learning communities (themes within a residence hall, with academic programming)
 - Service learning (project-based academic work), including internships
 - Research with a professor (independent study projects, lab work, creative productions)
 - Study Abroad (short or long-term, either language-based or discipline based)
 - Capstone project
22. If your department is not involved with a living learning community in a residence hall, consider either proposing one or engaging with a current one:
www.uky.edu/StudentAffairs/ResidenceLife/livingLearning.html
23. Develop service learning activities in your programs:
You can find out more about service learning and internships at this site:
www.uky.edu/CareerCenter/faculty.htm
Examples of service learning projects can be found here:
www.uky.edu/CareerCenter/files/service-learning.doc
24. Investigate opportunities for your students to work, study or intern in a different country or language area. Go to <http://abroad.ad.uky.edu/> and click on “faculty/staff” for contact information.
25. Organize research projects with professors and practitioners in your discipline. Research with a professor can be organized in your department or through the undergraduate research offices on campus: www.uky.edu/EUREKA/

Compiled by the Undergraduate Education Office