

## Chris Joiner

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**From:** Tony Holland  
**Sent:** Monday, October 22, 2012 12:31 PM  
**To:** Bill Sellers; Kathy Buntin; Shannon Thomas  
**Subject:** (FWRD) Grit!!  
**Attachments:** Grit.pdf

The following are excerpts from an article sent out by Mr. Cobb to his division. Although most of your faculty should have already implemented much of this, it is so important that it cannot hurt to reiterate these concepts so basic to student success and student learning.

### Classroom Practice: Strategies for Improving Retention

- Our best experiences in teaching are those where we connect with our learners and are of genuine assistance to them.”

Most students decide whether to continue enrollment within the first 6-8 weeks of their first semester. What happens on the **first day** of class sets the learning climate for the entire semester and may help a student decide whether to stay or flee. On the first day you should:

- **Be enthusiastic!!** If you act bored or lack passion for teaching or your subject matter, you will impart that attitude to your students. Why would students want to learn your subject in your class if you don't seem interested or interesting?
- Begin **building connections (supportive relationships)** with your students. Introduce yourself. Tell students what you would like them to call you and how you can be reached outside of class. Tell them how you chose your field of study and your educational background. If you went to a community college, be sure to let them know that as well.
- **Learn about your students.** (*this is where writing assignments play an important role*) Ask students to complete an information sheet listing name, address, phone number, e-mail address, major, work information, how many hours a week they work outside of class, why they are taking this class, what other courses they are taking, what grade they expect to earn, how much time they expect to study outside of class, strengths and weaknesses, previous related courses, etc. Respond to their information sheet by writing a short note to each student saying something positive as well as expressing concerns (e.g., “You’re working a lot of hours and taking a lot of courses. I’m concerned that you may not be able to be as successful as you and I would like you to be or... You indicated that you expect to spend 1 hour outside of class studying each week and expect to earn an A. Typically students who get A’s report that they had to spend 8-10 hours a week outside of class time.”). This helps take advantage of the “teachable moment” as well as provides a way for you to begin a dialog with each student.
- **Learn student names as quickly as possible**, and use them when addressing students in class (and out of class).
- **Set a positive tone that focuses on student success.** When students see your syllabus and course requirements, they may feel overwhelmed. **Be reassuring.** Let students know that you believe they can succeed, and let them know you will help them. The purpose of the first class session should **set up an expectation for success**, not scare students away!
- Involve students (**engagement!**) and encourage participation in first-day activities so that they become active learners early in the course.

- **Don't just read the syllabus.** Students find that as uninteresting as faculty do! Instead, design a group activity for students to understand both the syllabus and course policies. In this way students will get to know their classmates and begin to make connections as well as learn about the syllabus. Refer to your syllabus often so that students understand its importance in communicating information critical to their success.
- Determine students' goals and objectives while discussing your goals and objectives. Let students know how your course can fit in with their personal or career goals and objectives. **(relevant instruction!)**
- Communicate what students can expect of **you** and what you expect of them. This can be done orally or by writing students a short letter or memorandum. Baltimore City Community College provides a good example of shared expectations in their Covenant for Success, which was passed as a Board Policy and is published on their web site. The covenant describes the responsibilities of faculty, staff, and students toward ensuring student success.
- Be respectful of students' other responsibilities. Many of your students have obligations to family and jobs that will consume much of their out-of-class time. If possible, include exam and assignment due dates on your syllabus or give students considerable advance notice about important dates.
- Help students understand the amount of work that goes into being successful. Explain that **being successful in college is less about brains and more about willingness to work hard and spend many hours outside of class reading, reviewing, doing assignments, and studying.** Help students budget their time by informing them how much time they will need to devote to study outside of class. **(SEE ATTACHED ARTICLE ON 'GRIT'**...although this is an editorial, the same information was contained in an article in the *Chronicle for Higher Ed* this month) **The fuel for this 'GRIT' is enthusiasm and confidence through small successes, combined with a strong answer to 'why you are here'.**
- **Don't dismiss class early on the first day.** If there is time remaining after your syllabus activity, begin communicating the content of your course.
- Require students who miss the first class to meet with you in your office so that you can get to know them as well as answer any questions they have about the course or syllabus.

Many of the above suggestions are not just for the first day. You may want to review these suggestions whenever you are starting a new topic, explaining a difficult assignment, or periodically throughout the course. The following strategies and techniques can be used throughout your course:

- You should be the **first to arrive and last to leave class.** Visit with students before or after class. Get to know a new student each class. Make maximum use of the contact time you have with students.
- Provide an environment in which there is **acceptance of diversity and respect for every individual.**
- Deal directly with student attitudes by **explaining why** certain materials are taught as well as why they are taught in particular ways.
- Listen carefully to student comments. Rather than dismissing their ideas, add to them to make the students feel that their ideas and opinions are worthwhile.
- Allow students to relate and apply personal, family, or cultural experiences or histories in class assignments, and affirm the validity of their experiences and histories. **(relevant instruction)**
- Select materials that reflect diverse opinions, authors, etc.
- Include practical, real-life examples from many cultures in course content. **(relevant instruction)**

\* Provide prompt feedback that encourages student learning and persistence.

-Provide **positive reinforcement** to student questions by giving respectful answers to questions.

-Return materials as soon as possible with comments. Write something positive on each assignment or exam.

-Use your imagination to devise ways to positively reinforce student accomplishments. Consider using stickers, certificates, and public praise.

-Communicate course progress/grades frequently. Bb is perfect opportunity for this.

- Encourage or require students to visit you in your office. Meeting one-on-one is an opportunity to learn about individual students and answer questions that they might not ask in class. In addition, students who may be timid about coming to your office with questions are more likely to seek your assistance after visiting your office the first time.
- Put a sign on your door: “‘ Students are welcome here!’
- **Encourage and praise students. Stress a ‘you can do it attitude’ and emphasize your willingness to provide help.** Praise for ‘effort’, not just ‘results’...these will come with continued effort in the right direction.

Tell success stories of past students. Share your struggles and successes with learning.

Identify students who are headed for academic difficulty as **early** in the course as possible. **Take the initiative to contact** and meet with students who are doing poorly. Don’t just write see me on a paper or exam. Approach the student before or after class to arrange a meeting. Be especially cautious with the passive student who comes to class, sits quietly, doesn’t participate, and does poorly on evaluations. Other warning signs you should look for include (Seidman)

- o Late or uncompleted assignments
- o Repeatedly missing class, coming late, or leaving early
- o Not participating in class discussions
- o Not taking notes
- o Doing poorly on assignments, quizzes, and/or tests
- o Not attentive
- o Disruptive
- o Appears tired or hung over in class

- Provide many opportunities for success.....**frequent low stakes assessments!** Provide early opportunities for success. Increase the difficulty of the material as the semester progresses. In addition, frequent evaluations will provide opportunities for you to make course adjustments if your students are struggling.
- Set high, but realistic expectations. Research has shown that a **teacher’s expectations have a powerful effect on student’s performance** (Forsyth and McMillan, 1991). If you act as though you expect students to succeed, they are more likely to succeed.
- Help students set achievable goals for themselves. Encourage students to focus on their **continued improvement**, not just on their grade on any one test or assignment. Set up a grading system that provides the possibility for students to succeed if they mastered the learning objectives even if they struggled in the first part of the course.
- Circulate around the class as you talk or ask questions rather than standing behind a lectern, desk, or computer for the entire period.
- Help your students **learn how to learn** the content in your discipline. Integrate study skills training into your courses.
- Help students set up study groups.

- Build a sense of community in and out of the classroom. **“We are Wallace. We are Community!”** Provide opportunities for students to get to know and learn from other students in the class. Integrating academics and social opportunities increases retention. Use collaborative/cooperative assignments to foster social and academic integration.

Unfortunately, there is no magical formula that will help you retain 100% of your students every semester. Some students should never have been in your class in the first place. Others withdraw for reasons that are not within your control. You can, however, increase student learning and improve the odds for retention and success by **helping students become more connected and engaged in their learning.**

**Tony Holland**

*Dean, Instructional Affairs*

*Wallace Community College*

*Dothan, AL 30603*

334.556.2214

[tholland@wallace.edu](mailto:tholland@wallace.edu)