

Building Sustainable Local & World Community through Excellence in Student Success

The Critical First Three Weeks

“When students participating in focus groups are asked if they ever have considered dropping out of college, many students say they have. And when asked what helped them stay in college, students’ answers, almost without exception, are about relationships. They talk about a specific person, whom they mention by name – a faculty member, an advisor, an administrative support professional – who inspired them to stay.”

Dr. Kay McClenney, Director
SENSE – Survey of Entering Student Engagement

- Think positively about your students and their potential. Consistently express high expectations for student performance and success.
- Clearly explain learning outcomes, syllabi and grading policies on the first day of class. Explicitly state your expectations regarding students’ responsibilities in the learning process. Help your students understand what it really takes to succeed.
- Stress the importance of attendance.
- Make sure students know how to get in touch with you outside of class. Respond promptly to their phone call and/or e-mail messages.
- Conduct activities to introduce students to one another during the first class session.
- Learn and use every student’s name.
- Incorporate early and frequent student interaction with peers and with you into the design of classroom learning experiences and course requirements. Be intentional! Engagement doesn’t happen by accident; it happens by design.
- Engage your students in active and collaborative learning experiences (e.g., learning communities, small group activities/assignments, and group discussion).
- Promote out-of-classroom learning experiences for your students (e.g., study groups, group projects, faculty conferences, related service learning, and required participation in college co-curricular events).
- Include information on the Center for Tutoring & Learning Connections (located in Medina Hall, M216) and other support services available at Richland in your syllabus.
- Help students know how to study in your discipline and how to prepare for their assignments and tests.
- Provide students with early (first three weeks of class), prompt, and frequent feedback on their academic progress and performance.
- What students perceive as classroom values makes a difference. Establish a safe and engaging classroom environment where all students feel welcome and comfortable. Class norms can be introduced in detail the first day of class and reinforced during the semester (e.g., *“students should listen respectfully to different perspectives and let classmates finish sentences before responding”*).
- Plan activities to engage students outside the classroom such as meeting students in the cafeteria, accompanying students on field trips, and attending student recitals, performances and athletic events.

