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TEACHING AND LEARNING INSIGHTS

This issue's section on Teaching and Learning Insights draws on advice from past participants — both faculty members and student consultants — in the Students as Learners and Teachers (SaLT) program regarding how to collaborate with one another. This advice was solicited as part of the regular feedback gathered from participants in the SaLT program, a part of The Andrew W. Mellon Teaching and Learning Institute (TLI) at Bryn Mawr College, and faculty members and student consultants generated their responses separately from one another. Their advice is gathered together here in order to address how faculty and students in other contexts might foster learning in parallel and in partnership.

Have an Open Mind

“A lot of what goes on between a Student Consultant and their faculty partner is reliant on/subject to the personal styles of both of the individuals. I would just encourage anyone that does this, both faculty and student, to approach the experience with an open mind and be willing to push through discomfort and fear.” – Student Consultant

“Be open, engaged and willing to be surprised. This is the advice I would give future participants.” – Professor

“My advice for both students and faculty participants is to be as open as you possibly can. The key to these type of exchanges is respect, honesty, and an ability to expose yourself up to new and different perspectives.” – Student Consultant

“Come in with an open mind about how much you can change your perspective, but do not to get hung up on a perceived need for a radical change in your pedagogy: one of the most valuable things about this [experience] for me has not necessarily been learning completely new ideas, but rather forcing me to think through, articulate, refine, and put into a stronger framework the techniques I have in place.” – Professor

Structure Your Partnerships:

“Make sure that you have the opportunity to sit down and talk about your expectations, hopes, questions, and anxieties with your Student Consultant before the semester begins, and when you email her to set up the meeting, make sure that you type in the right date and time so you don't find yourself sitting in your office wondering about her flakiness when the flakiness was in fact yours.” – Professor

“Be realistic about your time commitment at the beginning of the semester. If you know that it may not be feasible for you to attend every class session, be sure to have an honest discussion about this before you begin your partnership.” – Student Consultant

“Try to find a way (either through student consultant meetings, the workbook, or your own method) to keep track of where ‘you are at’ with this work at different points over the course of

the semester. It's often easier to see changes—shifts in thinking, perception, or attitude—of someone else as opposed to ourselves.” – Student Consultant

Engage in Real Dialogue:

“What I found most useful was talking to [the student consultant] about the class — just formulating what I was thinking and what I was worried about. What I got was the opportunity to first articulate to myself and to interested people what I want to happen in the classroom, why do I teach to begin with. And then a useful conversation about enacting those goals. And then a better sense of the people I am trying to help, meaning students.” – Professor

“I think it really helped that the professor got to know me and I got to know him as a person and not just as a Student Consultant and a professor. I like to stay professional about my role, but occasionally talking about a completely unrelated topic with your professor can really help you build a sense of teamwork that is beneficial for the TLI work we do as student consultants.” – Student Consultant

“Don't be afraid to be open about the, ahem, challenges that you are facing in the classroom as well as the good things that happen. Usually when you have a story about something that goes horribly awry, someone else has a better story. Usually.” – Professor

“I've really enjoyed having this different kind of relationship with my faculty member because it allows us to exceed the roles of teacher-student and talk on a whole new level, in how we can support each other. We have also been able to discuss not just the class I am TLIing but also any of her other classes which is bringing us much closer together, which sometimes takes a lot longer than expected but it is all with good results.” – Student Consultant

Acknowledge the Challenges of Collaboration:

“There is a kind of 'arc' in the partnership and it is typical to have points where things really seem to click and other's were there may be a feeling of dissonance or distance. It also seems obvious but helpful to remind folks that each partnership is different with faculty partners who enter into the program from different places, different disciplines and with different ideas for their ideal classroom environments. In this way partners may access risks in the classroom differently and have varying comfort levels with student feedback. Too, it seems important to recognize the connections and common goals in pedagogy among participants that reach across these differences. Also, while wanting to respect the feelings and reluctances a faculty partner may come in with, as a student consultant, the perspectives you bring are valid and deserve consideration.” – Student Consultant

“One thing in particular [my student consultant] did well was this: she understood that opening oneself up to criticism is a difficult thing to do, and she helped me process the feedback. After our final meeting, she said in an e-mail that she admired my ability to take feedback constructively. I told her that it has been a process in my professional development to get to that point, and I appreciated her acknowledgment of it.” – Professor

“Don’t let yourself feel frustrated for too long... try to articulate to yourself what it is that is frustrating and seek help from other student consultants or [the facilitator of the program]. Most likely, the problem is resolvable, or at least it can be reframed so that you know how to approach it in a different way. Remember that your partner is a person, who has certain insecurities just like all people, and the best way to help them is to be supportive and understanding.” – Student Consultant

Rethink Your Models for Faculty/Student Roles and Relationships:

“I think I have a more collaborative model for the classroom...I feel there is a mode of professor as all-knowing font, and there’s another possible model that I am kind of a classmate, and that somewhere in the middle there, somewhere in the middle is ‘coach’...I am feeling from this experience that I can move more toward the classmate side of the scale.” – Professor

“I would reiterate the importance of meeting your partner where he or she is at and trying not to place your own expectations about the role or their teaching (and where you want their teaching to end up) on your partnership prematurely. I would also encourage consultants to reach out to one another for support and advice and to take time, when possible, to really reflect on the uniqueness of their role and how they are interacting in these classrooms and then on campus.” – Student Consultant

“I work with students more as colleagues, more as people engaged in similar struggles to learn and grow. I have become even more convinced that students are experts in learning and essential partners in the task of creating and developing new courses and refining existing ones.” – Professor

“Think about how being a student consultant affects the way you conduct yourself as a student, the way you view your professors, the way you see education and your place in it. Breaking down the typical dichotomy between student and teacher and creating this additional role in the classroom provides the opportunity and perspective to redefine how we understand education and the chance to think about what its purpose truly is.” – Student Consultant