

Rise, Teach, Learn - Season 1, Episode 4

Student Engagement Challenge

00:03

We acknowledge and are mindful that CSU Chico stands on lands that were originally occupied by the first people of this area, the Mechoopda, and we recognize their distinctive spiritual relationship with this land and the waters that run through campus. We are humbled that our campus resides upon sacred lands that will sustain the Mechoopda people for centuries.

00:27

Welcome to the Rise, Teach, Learn podcast. I am Dr. Chiara Ferrari, Director of Faculty Development at Chico State. And we are happy to make this resource available to our campus community and beyond. The podcast is hosted by Dr. Jamie Gunderson. And she will engage in timely conversations with faculty, staff, and students and give you a taste of the Chico experience. Subscribe to our podcast and explore the many resources available on our website. Thank you for listening.

01:00

Hello, and welcome to Rise, Teach, Learn. I'm your host, Jamie Gunderson. In our fourth episode entitled student engagement challenge. We discussed the impacts of engagement on learning and teaching and explore practices and resources that can enhance interaction and foster connection and community in digital learning environments.

01:24

Okay, so I am here with a whole slew of folks today. We have our Faculty Fellows, which I'm just going to take a moment to allow them to go around and introduce themselves.

01:36

Hi, I'm Paul Bailey. I am a lecturer in the math department in the School of Education.

01:41

Hi, I'm Dustin Bakkie. I am a lecturer in kinesiology.

01:45

I am Chris Crews. I'm a lecturer in comparative religion and humanities.

01:50

And with us today, we have a student who's also going to give us her perspective on the student engagement challenge. Hi, I'm Jessica and I am currently a credential slash graduate student in the class program at Chico State. And I'm super excited to be here. And none of this would be possible without our fearless leader, the Director of the Office of Faculty Development, Dr. Chiara Ferrari. Thank you, Jamie. And thank you, everyone for joining us

today for this episode. My name is Chiara Ferrari, and I am normally a professor in media arts Design and Technology. But I started in July as director of faculty development, and I cannot think of a better time and maybe more challenging, but better time to be supporting faculty than then this time. Totally agree. And that segues really well to kick off our conversation on student engagement. So first, Chiara, I want you to kind of just share a little bit about some of the resources that you have led our team to create in light of these challenges, and in light of these virtual contexts. Now, given the pandemic, given that we are all virtual, my priority was to really create different resources that faculty, faculty and staff and students, these are not just resources for, for faculty, of course, they're primarily designed for faculty, but resources that people could access in different ways. So be at a podcast, the more like teaching guides that can offer ideas for applications. We also have a zine that kind of provides a little bit more of an informal set of resources and stories. And so, in thanks to all of you, we have been able to produce these resources really following the practices and principles of universal universal design for learning.

03:50

So I'm excited that we can offer teaching guides. And the reason why I'm particularly excited about the teaching guides is because we have been able to pair them with the podcast. So whenever we release a podcast, we also pair resources that faculty can apply to their classes. We offer research, we offer ideas for application, and then we offer podcast videos, the website to explore. So again, a whole gamut of resources that faculty can choose from. So I'm excited that even this podcast will be paired with some additional teaching guides. We've had a lot of fun creating those different resources and exploring different ways to get out information to faculty just to support teaching and learning on campus. But one of the most creative things and I always love a challenge or a mission, if you will, was this idea of a student engagement challenge. One thing that I was very excited about to work with the faculty fellow was to propose a student engagement to challenge

05:00

And I know that Dustin had some experience he had done. Some of these challenges in his own classroom had seen some examples. And the part that really interested me is that one of the biggest struggle that faculty are having, or one of the biggest struggle that faculty are sharing about faculty about their students struggling is precisely student engagement, I would say that, if I were to choose, the number one concern that keeps on coming up in conversations with faculty is we're having a really hard time keeping the students engaged. So through this challenge, we wanted to give faculty some ideas on how to keep the students engaged. However, I also realized that oftentimes, student engagement might mean an increase workload for faculty. And so I wanted, I was very pleased and very grateful to Dustin for creating challenges that were really plug and play that had prompts that had sample ideas for activities, sample surveys, that faculty didn't have to spend a lot of time creating. So I, I really appreciated the attention that we had towards, on the one hand, increasing student engagement, while on the other not increasing faculty workload, I kind of started thinking about this back, actually, last semester. So in the fall, as we were talking to people, I mean, spring was wild with the transition. So it was kind of like the Wild West, and who knows what was going on and where things gonna be different in the fall. And just the thing that I heard most was engagement. How do we keep students engaged when they're online? Because they have the world at their fingertips, right?

06:58

Normally, they have it on their phone, but now that they're right next to the screen, while on zoom, or doing these digital activities, how do we keep them engaged. And one of the great books that I was reading during the time was 99 tips for creating simple and sustainable educational videos. It's kind of a mouthful by Karen Costa, but it's a great pickup, if any of you are looking for something like that. But she mentioned this research out of Purdue and it was this step is this index of 32,000 students that really looked into what went into a positive sense of well being and engagement within a classroom in a workspace. And they kind of came up with three pillars that I really resonated with, when I started thinking about my undergraduate experience, and even graduate experience and the classes that I became invested in and got excited about and the ones that I was likely to skip for guitar hero in my dorm room, right. Um, so the three pillars that they came up with were that the instructors need to care about their students first as people first and so that is the most important foundational pillar right there. And then it's about making students excited about learning. That's the second pillar. And the third pillar is encouraging them to pursue their own goals. So if we could kind of build a foundation around these three pillars, we're going to encourage engagement. And so I started thinking about, like, how would this work and look like, on like, smaller, granular, easy to implement? level. So I came up with these four tasks. And the first two, I definitely dedicated to that first one have a sense of being cared about as the person first. And so the ones that we did is the first one was the power of the name, right. And that's the first and most important one just, I asked educators and faculty to really start using their students names as granularly as possible.

09:06

So, Jamie, thank you for contributing. Paul, it's nice to see you. Like literally every one of my students who turns on their camera. I'm like, it's nice to see you this morning. Jessica. It's nice to see you Nathan, like, and I say hi, and respond using names in the chat. And what it does is like the students feel seen, and they want to be a part of it and makes them feel like they're part of this community. And so when they feel seeing they participate, the second one was kind of going a little bit deeper with some sort of personal check in. So again, letting students know you care about them as a person. And so I encourage the two word check in because it's fast and easy, right? You can just say in two words, let me know how you're feeling. And one of the things that I really encouraged here was anonymous, and when we are talking, safety type things and things that don't feel safe and risky like sharing, dang, I feel crappy today or today has been really hard or, you know, whatever vulnerable things that are going on. Sometimes anonymity can help with that, and that honesty and really getting expressing and it doesn't mean that they don't feel seen or can't be heard. It's you acknowledge it, you still say like, Hey, I see a couple of you are really having a hard day or a hard week. And you can even take action on that you can be like, hey, let's extend this assignment by a couple of days, you know, based on what it needs. I remember, in the fall, when I was kind of running through this, for the first time with my students, I did this and I found out my students were just beat down. So I changed the homework to a self care assignment. And we were studying epidemiology. So mental health and health care, like that is part of it. So I was able to tie it to the content. But that assignment showed up in my sets, they're like the best assignment of the year, this entire semester was this self care homework assignment that you gave us. So you could really make a difference by finding out where they're at with these kind of things.

11:11

Week Three, was really focused on the second pillar where we try to get students to get excited about their learning. And this is one that I really like, it comes from the one and only flower Darby. And I kind of put a little spin on it. And I love it. Because this really incorporates UDL as well, which is universal design for learning and letting students approach learning in the way that kind of fits them in their interests. And this is where they kind of do a personal connection, scavenger hunt. And so you asked students to do a couple of different things, either find two current resources, and you can leave it big and broad, let them go out there and like, find something and that's part of the challenges, what actually out there in the world connects to class, right, they have to understand the content to understand if it connects or not, or find an expert and reach out to them or create a portfolio of their work.

12:04

And then week four was really about kind of finishing strong, and encouraging students to pursue their own goals. And this is where we ask students to apply some of the content that they've learned to their own goals. And so again, it's kind of looking like, how can I relate this to what I want to do even in a class that doesn't feel relevant to them in their future and their careers. And sad was kind of a wrap up overview of the challenge and kind of why we did some of the things that we did.

12:36

That's awesome, Dustin, thank you so much. And again, this is all aligned to research what we know about learners. I want to open it up to the other fellows, Paul Bailey and Chris Crews to kind of talk about what this challenge might look like in their classroom. I know for me, one of the things I really tried to focus on was the granular naming, like, every time I responded to a question or something in the chat, I really tried to use student names. And so that was something that, you know, maybe seems so small, but so easy to do, and, and has so much impact. So, Paul, Chris, are there any particular pieces of the challenge that you implemented? And what did that look like in your classroom?

13:19

You know, some of these things I do some variation of already in practice, but I kind of latched on immediately to the name challenge. And it was also as nice as a self reflective practice, right? Like, I could realize, like, how normal does this feel to me? So like, I realized, like, how much am I already doing this? And then where am I not like, cuz you tell just feels different when it's something that's unfamiliar, right, versus something that's familiar. But also, the reason why this jumped out at me first is because I feel that it also has some strong connection to, you know, when we're talking about culturally responsive teaching practices as well, while we didn't get to quite that depth in what we sent out with the emails, this is very, you know, immediately connected to that idea. And so even just thinking about, like, when we take the time to make sure we learn how to say names and how to communicate in, in, offer appropriate respect to students, you know, identity is just like, our name is a very big part of our identity, right? And so, one of the things I go back to a lot is like that first day of school class, right, where you're going through roles, just to see who's there who needs to add what everyone's names are, I use that as a strategy to start trying to learn names. I'm also really bad at names so like I extra focus on it to help get things to stick. And but every single semester, every single class, I have at least one student where I say their name, and I go, is that right?

And they go that's fine. And they go No, how do you say it? Right? Like because we have to make that clear because historically in our education system, that's not usually how the power dynamic works, right? It's I'm gonna say it how I say it as like as the instructor and and I think it's important that we're able to flip that So that we're giving power back to the students, and we're acknowledging this important part of identity so that we can recognize to how to acknowledge the other important parts of identity.

15:10

Paul, I love that you brought that up, I feel this is really relevant right now with what has happened in Atlanta with these kind of Asian hate crimes that happened and the media coverage in their inability to correctly pronounce these victims names. And just kind of the outrage that that has caused and reinforcement of the fact that there is major work to be done in this area. And like Paul said, This culturally, or culturally responsive teaching, it is important that we get those things right. And I experienced the same thing, first day of school, you could call me whatever I'm like, no, it's your name. What do you want to be called? Right? And, you know, it's important to call people, what they want to be called.

16:04

Yeah, it's a funny language thing. But this reminds me a lot of like, being bilingual and living in kind of two worlds linguistically. I think a lot about the fact that in Spanish, we say me llamo, not mi nombre es. And to me, that's, that's meaningful, and kind of a deep level, because it's like, well, yeah, like, we have names, and we have all these different names. But it's very, like, direct, this is what I call myself. And the implication is, that's what I expect you to call me as well. So I like how specific that is in my other language.

16:35

I feel like this is a good time to get a little perspective from the student side. So Jessica, obviously, the challenge wasn't something we blasted out to students. So faculty were just engaging in these behaviors as kind of more of a reflection and implementation practice. But from the student perspective, you know, specifically with just saying names, can you tell me what your observations were? The naming thing, I think, is something so little, that means so much. And I've noticed that Jamie, in your class, you You really did you, you went and you have been calling us by name and mentioning us in the chat by name. And it means a lot to just feel seen and recognized, like you were all saying, and I think it's something that faculty has been doing so props to you all for pushing that challenge, because I've seen it and even when I'm using remind or different platforms to reach out to my my professors, if it feels more personal to just be like, Hi, Jamie on pronto, or whoever it is, and they respond with a Hi, Jessica, how are you?

17:34

Alright, so we talked a lot about how important it is to use a student's name. And I want to kind of get into those last few tasks that aligned to those pillars and talk about this idea of the check in. So Dustin, your email was really neat and offering a couple different options and entry ticket and a two word option for checking in with students. And I know that this looks different in pretty much any classroom. For me, I use a lot of interactive slides, sometimes I just open it up to allow students to kind of chat and unmute and share their opinions. But Paul

and Chris, I want to kind of bring it back to you in terms of checking in on your students, what types of strategies are you using in your classroom and what seems to be most effective? So one of the things I learned from last semester, this semester, is that trying to find ways to fit our old traditional strategies into this new was too much of this round, you know, peg square hole scenario, and it just wasn't working for me. And so I decided to re completely redo all of my classroom policies in order to be way more flexible. And the problem the challenge with that has been that with the additional flexibility gives them more space to feel safe, and meeting the learning objectives essentially on their own terms. But it's harder sometimes to get to keep some of the folks that might slip through the cracks, cracks from slipping through the cracks. And so what I've been doing, and this is a thing that works for me personally, but as I've been going through and keeping track of like submitting assignments and doing all that and whatever feedback I'm getting from the students and for the students, and then making a point of explicitly emailing students individually, about whatever specific needs or successes they're having in the classroom, and I've found, even over the semester, is that when you do that, I think students see it infrequently enough. That even just that little thing, they're like, Oh, awesome, thank you for reaching out to me. And the other thing is, too is the folks that haven't developed some of the same social capital or navigational capital that some of our more privileged students have developed. They don't know they can do certain things. So like when I say hey, you missed this assignment, but we have flexible deadlines. like can you get this to me as soon as possible or let me know if you need some support in getting it dealt with

All of a sudden, they say, oh, my goodness, I didn't know I had other options. I thought like, I didn't do it, and now I have zero, and I'm gonna fail the class and, you know, semesters over. So like just that helps the students that we frequently miss anyway

20:15

you can just echo something that Paul was saying there, because I think it's really important. And so throughout 2020, as we were sliding into the pandemic, I was teaching a class called the end of the world in religious studies. And this is an asynchronous class. So it poses some sort of different challenges. And none of us knew, as we were, you know, starting in January, that we would be entering a global pandemic, and the end of the world being very relevant. But one of the things that I've done in my classes, and I think it really showed in that period, was, you know, about week three or so to do a check in, you know, very much along the lines of what Dustin provided for us see how people are doing, you know, with the class, mentally, physically, emotionally. And then to do that, again, at about, you know, a week, maybe eight or week nine, and to use those as a way not just to see how the students are doing, but as a way for us as faculty to figure out how do we need to change our classes, and particularly in that spring of 2020, you know, I ended up changing the last couple of weeks of class, just in response to students saying, There's too much going on, I'm overwhelmed, I've lost my job, or my jobs, you know, family health issues. And if we're, if we've designed our classes in such a strict way that we don't have the flexibility to change, that's one problem. But if we don't take the time to check in with our students to find out what they need in the first place, so that we can then be responsive, that's a different challenge, right. So I think being able to do these kind of check ins become not just important for us as faculty, but if our goal, you know, at the end of the day is to have students learn something that's relevant to them and meaningful in how they participate, we have to have that kind of flexibility to respond to student feedback. And I think that's true, you know, whether we're in a pandemic

or not, I think that's just basic good teaching pedagogy across, you know, any level of education.

22:08

And the other thing I wanted to sort of put out there is, I think, and Paul and Dustin both touched on this. The challenge, really, I think, for us, as educators is, are we designing a class that works for our needs? Are we designing a class that works for student needs, and if it's for student needs, you know, asking about names, asking about how people are doing, those are things that are very much student centered, but we have to have that kind of information to be able to respond. And so I think that's super important. And I think that's one of the values of this challenge, or at least, the number two of these challenges in particular, but also number one with the names is forcing us to really think about how do we put the students at the center of these conversations and our learning? How do we revise classes to meet student needs? And how do we create that flexibility, because I can't tell you how many students I had that, you know, wrote to me, and said, you know, thanks for checking in, you know, to incorporate this into a pedagogical practice, I think is super, super important. You know, for everyone, regardless of what level of teaching we're doing.

23:12

I have to tell you, in doing these podcasts and doing the work that we're doing together as Faculty Fellows, I feel like the theme in the data in the research and what we know is happening at CSU Chico is that students want this connection, they want to be seen, they want to be heard, they want to have access, they want to have conversations they are and faculty too, are really craving this community, this connection, especially in these virtual times. I just love hearing y'all talk about those, it makes me so excited as a student just to know that, you know, professors, I can't tell you as like how much it like, means to hear other professors on campus. You know, I feel more encouraged as a student to speak out and to ask questions and to be engaged with my brain. When I know my professor has a little bit of investment into me, they care about me a little, even just a little bit, not a lot. I think the big thing just touching on like, what's, you know, Paul is saying and Chris and even Jamie, the transparency of this all I think is really important as a student if I know that my professors are willing to be flexible. And my professors are okay with having, you know, changing assignments from this date to this to date takes so much pressure off and it makes me as a student feel so much more encouraged to get my work done because my professor cares about me enough to change the due date or to change an assignment so that it works for the entirety of the class. That makes me more engaged when I'm sitting on camera, and I know that it's hard. I really think that we should remember that there has been progress and things are getting better easier on zoom. And I think that when I talk to my peers, we are figuring it out. And I think that it's really helpful that our faculty is trying. And knowing that our faculty is trying, I can't wait to share with my friends that like I just talked on a zoom meeting with four different professors who are all caring about their students, because I think that sometimes we feel like we're floating on an island over in different parts of Chico.

25:25

And there you have it, folks. Today we discuss the impacts of engagement on learning and

teaching, and we explored practices and resources that can enhance interaction and foster connection and community in digital learning environments. For more information on student engagement, including research practices and resources, check out our FDEV teaching guides entitled student agency, culturally responsive teaching, establishing positive learning environments, and enhancing student engagement and increasing student interaction. I'd like to thank doctors Ferrari, Bakkie, Crews and Bailey as well as Jessica Gorman for contributing to this episode. I'd also like to extend a special thank you to Quinn Winchell for our podcast music and to the vocal stylings of Dr. Browning Neddeau for the land acknowledgement. Join us for our next episode wherein we will learn more about universal design for learning with Dr. Loui Lord Nelson. Until then, we got this Wildcats!