

Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education

(Source: 'Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education.' American Association for Higher Education, 1986)

In 1986, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) along with the Education Commission of the States, and the Johnson Foundation, Inc., initiated the development of a series of inventories for assessing "good practice" in undergraduate education. The "Faculty Inventory" is included here for your use. While not all of the seven principles (or the practices listed under each principle) will be equally applicable to your role as a TA, or indeed every instructor, by completing the inventory you should become more aware of your areas of strength as well as potential areas for improvement. How many of the seven principles do you already use?

Faculty Inventory

Rate each of these questions on a five-point scale from very often to never. Then for each section comment on what you would like to work on. After reviewing all of your responses to these seven areas and the items within them, identify the key area(s) you would like to work on.

Good Practice Encourages Student-Faculty Contact

1. I advise my students about career opportunities in their major field.
2. Students drop by my office just to visit.
3. I share my past experiences, attitudes, and values with students.
4. I attend events sponsored by student groups.
5. I work with student affairs staff on issues related to student extracurricular life and life outside of school.
6. I know my students by name by the end of the first two weeks of the term.
7. I make special efforts to be available to students of a culture or race different from my own. I serve as a mentor or informal advisor to students.
8. I take students to professional meetings or other events in my field.
9. Whenever there is a conflict on my campus involving students, I try to help in its resolution.

Good Practice Encourages Cooperation Among Students

1. I ask students to tell each other about their interests and backgrounds.
2. I encourage my students to prepare together for classes or exams.
3. I encourage students to do projects together.
4. I ask students to evaluate each other's work.
5. I ask my students to explain difficult ideas to each other.
6. I encourage my students to praise each other for their accomplishments.
7. I ask my students to discuss key concepts with other students whose backgrounds and viewpoints are different from their own.
8. I create "learning communities," study groups, or project teams within my courses.
9. I encourage students to join at least one campus organization.
10. I distribute performance criteria to students so that each person's grade is independent of those achieved by others.

Good Practice Encourages Active Learning

1. I ask my students to present their work to the class.
2. I ask my students to summarize similarities and differences among different theorists, research findings, or artistic works.
3. I ask my students to relate outside events or activities to the subjects covered in my courses.
4. I ask my students to undertake research or independent study.
5. I encourage my students to challenge my ideas, the ideas of other students, or those presented in readings or other course materials.
6. I give my students concrete, real-life situations to analyze.
7. I use simulations, role-playing, or labs in my classes.
8. I encourage my students to suggest new readings, research projects, field trips, or other course activities.
9. My students and I arrange field trips, volunteer activities, or internships related to the course.
10. I carry out research projects with my students.

Good Practice Gives Prompt Feedback

1. I give quizzes and homework assignments.
2. I prepare classroom exercises and problems which give students immediate feedback on how well they do.
3. I return examinations and papers within a week.
4. I give students detailed evaluations of their work early in the term.
5. I ask my students to schedule conferences with me to discuss their progress.
6. I give my students written comments on their strengths and weaknesses on exams and papers.
7. I give my students a pre-test at the beginning of each course.
8. I ask students to keep logs or records of their progress.
9. I discuss the results of the final examination with my students at the end of the semester.
10. I call or write a note to students who miss classes.

Good Practice Emphasizes Time on Task

1. I expect my students to complete their assignments promptly.
2. I clearly communicate to my students the minimum amount of time they should spend preparing for classes.
3. I make clear to my students the amount of time that is required to understand complex material.
4. I help students set challenging goals for their own learning.
5. When oral reports or class presentations are called for I encourage students to rehearse in advance.
6. I underscore the importance of regular work, steady application, sound self-pacing, and scheduling.
7. I explain to my students the consequences of non-attendance.
8. I make it clear that full-time study is a full-time job that requires forty or more hours a week.
9. I meet with students who fall behind to discuss their study habits, schedules, and other commitments.
10. If students miss my classes, I require them to make up lost work.

Good Practice Communicates High Expectations

1. I tell students that I expect them to work hard in my classes.
2. I emphasize the importance of holding high standards for academic achievement.
3. I make clear my expectations orally and in writing at the beginning of each course.
4. I help students set challenging goals for their own learning.
5. I explain to students what will happen if they do not complete their work on time.
6. I suggest extra reading or writing tasks.
7. I encourage students to write a lot.
8. I publicly call attention to excellent performance by my students.
9. I revise my course.
10. I periodically discuss how well we are doing during the course of the semester.

Good Practice Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning

1. I encourage students to speak up when they don't understand.
2. I discourage snide remarks, sarcasm, kidding, and other class behaviors that may embarrass students.
3. I use diverse teaching activities to address a broad spectrum of students.
4. I select readings and design activities related to the background of my students.
5. I provide extra material or exercises for students who lack essential background knowledge or skills.
6. I integrate new knowledge about women and other underrepresented populations into my courses.
7. I make explicit provisions for students who wish to carry out independent studies within my own course or as separate courses.
8. I have developed mastery learning, learning contracts, or computer assisted learning alternatives for my courses.
9. I encourage my students to design their own majors when their interests warrant doing so.
10. I try to find out about my students' learning styles, interests, or backgrounds at the beginning of each course.

Importance of the seven principles

The links between each of the seven principles and student learning are explained below.

1. Good Practice Encourages Student Faculty Contact

Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans.

2. Good Practice Encourages Cooperation Among Students

Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions improves thinking and deepens understanding.

3. Good Practice Encourages Active Learning

Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves.

4. Good Practice Gives Prompt Feedback

Knowing what you know and don't know focuses learning. Students need appropriate feedback on performance to benefit from courses. In getting started, students need help in assessing existing knowledge and competence. In classes, students need frequent opportunities to perform and receive suggestions for improvement. At various points during college, and at the end, students need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how to assess themselves.

5. Good Practice Emphasizes Time on Task

Time plus energy equals learning. There is no substitute for time on task. Learning to use one's time well is critical for students and professionals alike. Students need help in learning effective time management. Allocating realistic amounts of time means effective learning for students and effective teaching for faculty. How an institution defines time expectation for students, faculty, administrators and other professional staff can establish the basis for high performance for all.

6. Good Practice Communicates High Expectations

Expect more and you will get it. High expectations are important to everyone for the poorly prepared, for those unwilling to exert themselves, and the bright and well motivated. Expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when teachers and institutions hold high expectations for themselves and make extra efforts.

7. Good Practice Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning

There are many roads to learning. People bring different talents and styles of learning to university. Brilliant students in the seminar room may be all thumbs in the lab or art studio. Students rich in hands-on experience may not do so well with theory. Students need the opportunity to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. Then they can be pushed to learning in new ways that do not come easily.