

DLSI NEWSLETTER

Supporting Teaching and Learning at La Salle

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AN OBSERVATION AND INVITATION

After writing [Connecting with Students in the Office](#), I (Frank) decided to make use of [Nowak's \(2021\)](#) suggestions and employ the practice of **required office visits** in EDC 350: How People Learn. It's really been an eye-opener.

I introduced the idea to my students during our first class: two required office visits (5 points each) over the course of the semester, and no agenda...just stop by to chat. For the most part, my students approached these conversations with guarded caution.

I began simply by asking how their semester was going. They are having such varied experiences across courses, at the university, and in life. In addition, because of the pandemic, an in-person, individual conversation with a professor has been a rare occurrence for many of them. They were soon sharing more than I expected.

I probed, asked for details or explanations...but mostly listened. I learned of successes and

frustrations. We've laughed, and I've offered tissues. I shared cooking experiences with one student, cycling experiences with another, got a lesson in fiber crafts, learned about a very sick family member, and talked through choosing a major.

After a while, I asked how our class is going for them. Everyone has had a comment or a question. Sometimes there are several, and they are good! They've raised questions that they didn't ask in class, and shared comments that they probably would not have offered otherwise.

Some students are satisfied with our conversations after a few minutes, but many have lasted longer than I would have anticipated. We were both just enjoying the time together.

Each has now completed the first of the two visits. In addition to the joy of simply connecting in person, the result is that we've enhanced our teacher-student relationship. I am gaining insight into what motivates my students, what they know, what they wonder, what they do for fun,

and what they find frustrating. Class participation has increased, and become more comfortable. Our interactions are more genuine.

Perhaps it is the result of all of us having to exist virtually for so long, but **I feel like we've lost something that needs to be regained**. At least for me, this has been a step in the right direction. While I've had to restructure my own time a bit, I have found it well worth it.

Anyway...**here is the invitation:**

While I strongly suggest you give this a try for yourself, and on your own terms, it strikes me that we might make it an interesting [SoTL](#) project. Nowak (2021) references some research, and there is other work out there for context. Maybe a few of us could take this on as a research project, collect some data, and analyze the impact of these unstructured, but required student-faculty visits.

If this piques your interest [drop me a line!](#)

ENGAGING PRACTICES ON CAMPUS

Emma Leonard, Assistant Professor, Political Science shares:

I'm supervising the political science senior seminar paper this semester. We have weekly writing goals, and meet regularly to share our work and provide each other with feedback. I am participating in this class as facilitator, but also writer. I have an article that I am working on alongside my seminar students and am also tasked with meeting the same writing goals the students have. As they move from section to section of their paper, I **focus attention** on that section in my own paper to give them a sense of what they are trying to achieve.

In my freshmen research methods class, the students are building a research design over the course of the semester. This provides the students hands on experience with developing research and again helps to keep me on track with my research, because I am also developing a research design alongside them. I post my "homework" ahead of their deadlines to provide them with a template for their own. My research design will then be my summer writing project. More importantly these practices **focus student attention** on critical elements of the

writing and research process, by **providing them with models** of what I am asking them to work toward.

Thanks, Emma! These are not only good examples of how we might **guide our students' attention**, but also how one might use classroom practice to facilitate scholarship, and illustrate to our students that we are also learners with them.

We are always interested in your classroom practice. [Please let us know](#) what is working for you so that we can share it in a future newsletter!

PAY ATTENTION!

Given that *all* sensory input enters our cognitive system, it is critical that educators give some thought to the nature of **attention**. We can only work with what we focus on, and [we can only focus on one task at a time](#). Further, cognitive scientists view attention as a limited capacity resource; that is, the more challenging the task, the more focused attention one needs.

The demands on the attention of our students is considerable, which means we need to understand where it is directed at all times. We can facilitate learning by providing them with tools and strategies to help them focus **on the right things**

at the correct times.

[Each class starts with an opportunity to grab and focus attention](#). In addition, posting an advance organizer on the board or screen, outlining the day's topics, or highlighting important points is helpful. Further, the [tips in this article](#) help us think about how to structure our class time and instruction to maximize student attention.

In an informative paper, [Keller, Davidesco, and Tanner \(2020\)](#) present a useful model for describing attention in the classroom. They suggest that while attention fluctuates throughout a class session, we can work to "orchestrate" or "leverage" it as we teach, by **employing active learning strategies**, directing student attention to one area or concept at a time, incorporating quiet moments that allow students to direct attention internally, and signaling key concepts to students.

The **DLSI can help** you embed some of these strategies into your classroom practice. [Please let us know if you are interested in discussing them further.](#)

MIDTERM CAN BE A GOOD TIME FOR US TO REFOCUS...

As you will read in the next column, midterm provides an opportunity for us to help our students reflect, refocus, and make changes that can improve learning. However it is also an **opportunity for us to collect feedback** from our students that allows us to take the “pulse” of a class, learn what is working (or not) for our students, refocus ourselves, and let them know that we are listening.

I know several colleagues who collect [“exit tickets”](#) after each class session, to ensure a line of constant communication. It’s a helpful tool that allows a quick **check-in with students**, and could also be done bi-weekly or monthly. If that feels too frequent, or you have not developed the practice, midterm provides an [excellent opportunity to survey students](#).

In most circumstances, these should be anonymous, allowing for feedback to be provided comfortably and honestly. They should be short and easy to complete, and can ask both general “satisfaction” questions and seek input on specific activities or topics.

Exit tickets and midterm surveys allow us to refocus our attention, so that we can best support the learning of our students.

...AND A GOOD TIME TO HELP OUR STUDENTS REFOCUS

Midterm grades and spring break offer students a chance to reflect on the semester and create a plan for moving forward. Conversations could happen in a whole class setting, in a meeting with a professor, during advising, or through services in the **Center for Academic Achievement**. Students who have access to one, can meet a student success coach to create a plan for the remainder of the semester, and even the summer. Here are some ways to focus the conversation:

- Consider assignments, exams, papers, presentations, participation, and attendance for each class. In which tasks have you found success, why? Where have you struggled? What makes those tasks more challenging?
- Which routines and strategies have been successful for you? Which ones are ineffective? How is time management, reading, studying, test-taking, and note-taking going?
- What feedback have you received about your work in class, and how can you use it to better meet course expectations?
- Which resources on campus (academic or personal) will you continue, or start using, to support your goals for the rest of the semester?

These conversations can also help students consider how the end of the semester differs from the start, especially if students will need to dedicate additional time to research papers, group projects, and final exams. It can be helpful to set expectations for remaining work.

The Center for Academic Achievement offers online workshop focused on mid-semester reflections after spring break. **Students can [register here](#)**. We can help with writing tutoring, subject tutoring, academic coaching, and supplemental instruction in select courses. Students can schedule appointments in Starfish. We value our partnership with faculty in **helping us portray help-seeking as a positive, proactive step towards attaining one’s goals**. In fact, many of our tutors have used tutoring to support their own success!

Please don’t hesitate to contact [Melissa Gallagher](#) (215.951.5115) with any questions, or to learn more about how we can help our students succeed together.