

Student-Centered Teaching

1 What is it?

Student-centered teaching, which aligns with active learning, changes the focus of the class from delivery of information by an instructor to the development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes by students. As an overarching approach to designing a course, a student-centered approach requires that we continually reflect on our assumptions, why we are making certain teaching decisions and how those decisions will help students develop the specific skills and knowledge that we expect them to gain from the course.

2 Why is it important?

Student-centered teaching approaches have been shown to improve student learning and performance (Freeman, et. al., 2014). Purdue instructors have found that student-centered course design improves motivation (McMurtrie, 2018). If we want students to get the most out of our courses then we have a moral imperative to adopt methods centered around student learning. And, many instructors report that their classes are more fun and engaging to teach when they adopt these approaches as well.

3 How to do it?

At Purdue, we adopt a framework from Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2002), a theory of human motivation, which centers around three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. As such, we suggest that student-centered course design should also focus on meeting these three needs:

- **Competence:** Scaffolding assignments with regular formative feedback helps students develop competence over time and recognize gaps in their current learning.

- **Autonomy:** We should develop strategies to give students freedom or autonomy within a structure, not total freedom. Perhaps there are multiple correct paths to reach an answer? Perhaps they can choose a topic or problem that interests them for a final project?
- **Relatedness:** We need to focus on building relationships and rapport both between ourselves and our students as well as between groups of students.

Tips and Tricks

- Insert formative assessments throughout big assignments so that students can get feedback and recognize gaps in their knowledge and skills before submission.
- Align course outcomes with assessments and activities. If your favorite activity does not actually help students reach the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the course outcomes and align with assessment methods, you may need to adjust or drop that activity.
- You can create a three-column table (Fink, 2003) to highlight alignment between course activities, assessments, and learning outcomes. Show how you will assess success regarding students' skills, knowledge, and attitude. Add the activities that will lead them to success from the level they enter the class to the end of the course.
- Solicit, collect, and respond to feedback on your teaching and student learning early and often. This helps students understand your design decisions, and adjustments can help their learning as well as support autonomy and relatedness.
- Be transparent, explain to students why you are asking them to do what you are asking, and make it clear what success will look like.
- Critical Reflection (Brookfield, 2016): We can reflect on our teaching through the adoption of four discrete lenses:

- Students' perceptions (see mid-semester feedback above)
- Colleague's perceptions
- Research and Scholarship
- Our own experiences

4 Additional Resources

- Early semester feedback: You can regularly apply practices like [minute papers](#) to see where students are stuck. You can create surveys at multiple points in the semester to explore what is working and what suggestions students offer. And, you can bring in outside consultants and partners to help collect and analyze students. Find here [Purdue's CIE created guidelines](#).
- [Self-Determination Theory](#)
- [Transparency in syllabi](#)
- [Critical Reflection](#)

5 References

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