Center for Civic Excellence

Best Practices for Teaching and Learning

The Center for Civic Excellence is committed to creating a community in which students and teachers thrive. Although good teaching can take many forms, the following seven teaching practices draw from a broad range of learning scholarship to offer a common vocabulary that Civic Teaching Fellows can use to describe their teaching and pursue continual improvement.

1. **Connect Learning to Civic Purpose**[1–9]**:** We help students understand why the course matters for civic life, public responsibility, ethical judgment, community engagement, or democratic participation.

2. **Engage Students in Critical Thinking, Complex Problems, and Inquiry**[2–4,8–14]**:** We give students practice in applying knowledge to complex, contested, ambiguous problems. This practice serves to activate curiosity, prior knowledge, and assumptions to prompt inquiry and prediction.

3. **Demonstrate Civility when Discussing Diverse Viewpoints**[15–20]**:** We model how to respond civilly to disagreements and give students a space to practice dialogue, collaboration, and respectful disagreement.

4. **Motivate Students through Productive Challenge**[16,21–28]**:** We challenge students in ways that feel achievable and cultivate a learning environment in which experimenting, taking risks, and making mistakes are celebrated as important steps of the learning process.

5. **Build Knowledge through Practice, Integration, and Transfer**[29–42]**:** We help students to practice, connect, and apply their learning over time and across contexts.

6. **Use Feedback and Encourage Reflection to Support Improvement**[3,4,7,41,43–52]**:** We provide clear expectations and feedback before high-stakes coursework and empower students to monitor, evaluate, and direct their own learning.

7. **Demonstrate Investment in Student Success**[7,15,17,18,22,24,53–56]**:** We respect, care for, and invest in students as learners and human beings.

Measuring Student Perception of Teaching Practices

The following questions are designed to measure students' perceptions of how frequently instructors use each of the seven teaching practices. They will be included as custom questions within each course's IDEA evaluation.

As with all data-informed teaching and learning metrics in the Civic Center, the specific wording of these questions may change over time in response to feedback from students and Civic Teaching Fellows to improve the quality and usefulness of the data, but the general spirit and number of questions will be preserved.

For the following questions, students will be asked to describe the frequency of their instructor's teaching procedures using the same scale employed by the IDEA Diagnostic Feedback Instrument:

- Hardly Ever
- Occasionally
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Almost Always

Teaching Practice 1. Connect Learning to Civic Purpose

1. Demonstrated the importance of course material to personal, civic, or public life.
2. Created opportunities for students to apply course content to real-world personal, civic, or societal questions.

Teaching Practice 2. Engage Students in Critical Thinking, Complex Problems, and Inquiry

3. Used course materials and assignments that required students to analyze complex problems using evidence and judgment.
4. Asked engaging questions or used activities that helped students discover answers for themselves.

Teaching Practice 3. Demonstrate Civility when Discussing Diverse Viewpoints

5. Demonstrated civility by engaging respectfully with diverse perspectives.
6. Fostered a learning environment that gave students practice engaging civilly with diverse perspectives.

Teaching Practice 4. Motivate Students through Productive Challenge

7. Assigned coursework that felt challenging but achievable.
8. Fostered a learning environment in which students felt comfortable learning from mistakes.

Teaching Practice 5. Build Knowledge through Practice, Integration, and Transfer

9. Provided opportunities for students to practice before *major* graded assignments, projects, or tests.
10. Prompted students to connect course material to prior knowledge or earlier course concepts.

11. Asked students to apply course concepts to new or unfamiliar situations.

Teaching Practice 6. Use Feedback and Encourage Reflection to Support Improvement

12. Provided clear instructions and expectations prior to major graded assignments, projects, or tests.
13. Gave timely feedback on student assignments.
14. Prompted students to reflect on what they had learned and where they needed to improve.

Teaching Practice 7. Demonstrate Investment in Student Success

15. Communicated that they believed students could succeed in the course.
16. Demonstrated care for students as individuals.

In addition to the above questions about teaching practices, students will also be asked two questions that can be used to calculate versions of the Net Promoter Score[57,58], which is widely used in the for-profit sector as a measure of general satisfaction, and has recently been applied in higher education settings[59–63]. These questions will be asked on a scale of 1-10, with 1 = "not at all likely," 5 = "neutral," 10 = "extremely likely."

17. How likely is it that you would you recommend this *instructor* to a peer?
18. How likely is it that you would you recommend this *course* to a peer?

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