

Facilitating Help-Seeking
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A challenge that continues to face all faculty concerns "effectively" encouraging students to seek academic assistance.

How often have we felt that those students who could benefit most from seeking help do not ask take advantage of the opportunities available?

Actually, help-seeking may take one of two forms: instrumental or executive help-seeking. Instrumental help-seeking represents competent, problem-solving behaviors that help students acquire and master increasingly complex skills. It takes the form of hints, guidance, and tutoring provided that leads students to self-discovery. Executive help-seeking, on the other hand, occurs when the intentions of the help-seekers are to have someone else solve the problem for them. While students may mistakenly come to our offices in search of the latter, faculty know that it is the former, instrumental help-seeking, that truly helps students learn.

Faculty who want to facilitate the help-seeking process might consider the following suggestions:

Demonstrate concern. Students can sense the difference between perfunctory and sincere offers of help. When students perceive their instructors as distant and impersonal, help-seeking attempts are less likely. Many students actually assess instructor concern before they care how much they learn.

Provide frequent feedback. When examinations are the only basis for assessment, students may not sense they need academic assistance in time to prevent failure. The earlier the need for intervention is realized and sought, the better is a student's chance for success.

Use collaborative learning teaching strategies. Research indicates that active learners are more likely to seek help. When collaborative strategies are employed in the classroom, students become active participants in the learning process. Difficulties are shared. As a result help-seeking becomes more socially acceptable.

Create an inclusive environment. Students need to know all contributions have value. Nudge them in the right direction by providing positive responses to build confidence and rapport.

Dispel the innate ability myth. Encourage students to realize that difficulties initially experienced in courses are often due to a lack of familiarity with a new discipline. Remind students that these difficulties are task related and can be overcome with appropriate persistence.

Eliminate intimidation. Shifting responsibility away from students makes helping episodes less threatening. Instead of saying "Do you understand?" try "Did my example make sense? Let me try to explain this more clearly."

Discuss faculty responsibilities. Some students are reluctant to approach faculty during their office hours. These students believe their academic problems are of lesser importance than the other responsibilities faculty face. To prevent misconceptions talk to students about faculty responsibilities.

Keep scheduled office hours. Make announcements in class when other responsibilities interfere. Post notes on your office door when you have stepped out for a few minutes so students will know to wait for your return.

Promote college and departmental support facilities including TAs and tutors. Some students may need to be encouraged repeatedly to take full advantage of the wide range of support facilities available to them.

Additional reading from the library of the CTL:

Davis, B. G. (2009). *Tools for teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass: 481-516.

Weimer, M. (2002). *Learner centered teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass: 95-118.