

Make education relevant and rekindle students' passion

"Is there a magic potion to rekindle students' interest and motivation?!" To seek reactions we had posted the following note on several social networks:

***It is obvious that undergraduates these days do not show the same motivation and commitment the way they did a decade or more ago. What is wrong?!*

Is it about the attitudes or the strategies?

Is it about the real value of the course or how it connects to the real world, to the students' concerns and interests? Is it about the skills and competences they desperately need to mature and become independent learners? Is it about the instructors' passion and enthusiasm for the topic they teach?

Clear enough, students are no longer passionate about their subjects! Wondering, where did we fail?! Haven't we organized academic programs to stimulate inquiry, critical thinking and problem solving abilities? Haven't we stressed on the academic communication competences and confidence students are urged to work towards, and raised their awareness on ethical aspects and social responsibility? Haven't we defined the goals for the course and emphasized the skills, knowledge, and perspectives students will gain at the end?

*Though the reasons are manifold, only the students can shed light on the subject. Help us understand your concerns. ***

The questions starting with "haven't we" did not imply any arrogance from our side. On the contrary, we wanted to point out to some strategies that might help the students get positively involved in the learning process. We believe that the learning material and approaches must connect to the students' goals, interests, and concerns. Many students and teachers reacted immediately and wrote profusely about this issue.

After reading teachers' and students' reflections, which were insightful and inspirational, we have come to propose a number of directions or pillars we believe they serve as a groundwork to build a new vision for education and passionate learning.

I. Focus on the course value

Show the specific value and articulate the learning goals for a particular course. Show relevance to students' curriculum. Instill curiosity and interest by explaining to students how the course will help prepare them for subsequent courses. Let them reach a better appreciation of the combined value of the courses within a broader academic framework. Highlight the professional relevance of higher-level skills such as quantitative reasoning, public speaking, persuasive writing, and teamwork. Demonstrate relevance to students' professional lives. Connect course material to students' personal interests without sacrificing intellectual or disciplinary rigor. Moreover, learning things that they will never use again after the test, students can easily feel uninterested or unmotivated to learn.

II. Focus on the skills

Students need to learn and apply the tools and skills in a project-based approach or service-learning project to attempt to solve real problems connected to real life and real

world. One effective way to induce student motivation is to highlight real-world applications of knowledge and skills. Make every course relevant and connect to the real world. Using “information systems” skills to design an e-portfolio or a personal blog make the students visible to future employers and create possibilities for future internships or jobs.

III. Enthusiasm is contagious

Show your own passion and enthusiasm to attract students and stimulate their curiosity. Help them discover the value of the course they might have initially overlooked.

IV. Focus on job opportunities

Does the course lead to a good job? Students care more about their future career and job prospects. Today’s undergraduates believe that their degree is a passport to the world of work. Most of them declare they won’t read around a subject for the love of it any more. The relationship between education and the economy is clear in their minds.

V. Focus on the evaluation systems

Everyone is extremely focused on examinations and getting good results. Heavy evaluation systems are likely to hinder students from cultivating a passion for a subject; furthermore, some declare that they are given an instrumentalist and unrewarding experience. Break the template and let the students think for themselves and deviate from the classical norms.

VI. Show them that someone cares...

As a closing remark: no, there is no magic potion to the academic crisis! No, there is no single and overarching theory to motivate students! All stakeholders are urged to collaborate to redefine the concepts for active and productive learning, a path where students are viewed as our partners and traveling companions!