Sarah Anderegg

From: Jonathan Eldridge
Sent: Thursday, November 30, 2023 8:48 AM
To: Jonathan Eldridge
Subject: Fall 2023 Faculty Information & Updates, Volume XVII
Attachments: The Social Classroom.pdf; Students Crossing Boundaries.pdf; Bookstore Apple Promo.png; Decompression Expression Self Care Drop-in.pdf

Dear College of Marin Faculty:

I hope you had good time with family and friends over the long holiday weekend. As we near final exams (!), a reminder you must hold your final on the day and at the time it is scheduled since students may have conflicting exams otherwise. If you have questions or concerns on that front, please consult with your dean.

This week I have attached two articles, each related to student behavior. 'The Social Classroom' considers the impact of courses on students' need for social interaction, especially given the multi-year isolation of the pandemic. It includes a case study from Evergreen Valley College, just down the road from us. The other, 'Students Crossing Boundaries,' looks at how to balance flexibility with behavior management as many students still face challenges with how to cope with myriad issues the pandemic magnified and exacerbated. Both reinforce the human aspect of teaching and learning and the uniqueness of being a college instructor at this moment in time. I'll be curious to hear whether the articles resonate.

As we wrap up the semester stress can elevate, so I encourage you to stop by the Decompression Event (flier attached) this coming Monday—and encourage your students to participate! Also attached this week is an offer from our College Bookstore for 10% discount on select Apple products.

Thank you for all you do.

Jonathan

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The Social Classroom

Connections can be key to students' academic success. Professors can help.

By Beckie Supiano
NOVEMBER 2, 2023

When Tammy Nguyen took an anatomy course at Evergreen Valley College last spring, her professor made sure that the students in her lab section got to know each other. Jennifer Kurushima, a biology professor, had the 25 students sit in different seats each time, asked them to learn each other's names, suggested they quiz each other during any down time, and encouraged them to trade contact information. Kurushima also offered extra credit if students went to the biology skills lab, a resource that the San Jose community college created to support its many students pursuing health-care careers.

Kurushima explained that learning names is important, and health careers require working with many different people. That made sense to Nguyen, who plans to become a nurse. She and her classmates formed a study group that regularly met at the skills lab. Before an exam, the group would migrate to the library after the lab closed, and then to a coffee shop after the library closed.

"Coming into Dr. Kurushima's class, it was really nice being able to expand my social circle," Nguyen says. "In high school, I was talking to the same people, with the same ideas, same mentality, same personality. Being in this class, it was really interesting to learn how to work with people who were very much different from me."

The weirdness of the pandemic emphasized for many that we are social creatures; during its most isolating stretch, the virtual classroom, hastily built as it was, remained a place where students and professors could attend to that aspect of their humanity. All the same, the pandemic warped the social experience of the teenagers who are now traditional-age college students. While many are eager to connect with their peers, they might not quite know how to go about it.

Helping them find their way is one more task on what may feel like an endless list for busy instructors. But connecting students with their classmates isn't just something that sounds nice or feels good. A growing body of evidence from neuroscience and related fields has shown that learning is enhanced — the human brain actually works differently — in the company of other people. And on the often-cliquey campuses of our deeply divided country, the classroom remains one of the rare places where people who might have little else in common are — sometimes, at least — asked to learn together, and from each other.

"If all of these students feel like an isolated individual in the classroom, they're not going to learn as effectively as if they come and feel part of a learning community," says Michael Brown, an associate professor of higher education and student affairs at Iowa State University who studies the social dimensions of learning. Students who form connections in one course can carry those connections into other courses, he says — and research shows that those who do so are more successful in their majors.

“Having people that you can go to with questions or concerns is helpful,” he says. “But the other thing that we gloss over as instructors is what happens after you leave my class.”

Students in courses where social connection is a priority can point to a host of benefits. They form connections, even friendships. They feel like they belong and have an incentive to show up and participate. They enjoy themselves. They learn more.

That was the case for Nguyen, who credits the study group for how well she did in anatomy. “I think it’s because I was able to collaborate with my classmates through that semester,” she says. “It really opened my eyes to what study methods worked for me, and what worked for me was teaching the material to my classmates and having them correct me on what I didn’t understand, and also explaining it to them in a way where they did understand it.”

Kurushima mixes up where students sit to help them connect. Jeff Goodman, a senior lecturer who teaches science education and media-arts courses at Appalachian State University, has long used humor. But during emergency remote instruction, Goodman realized that laughing together didn’t always work on Zoom. Not everyone had their mic on, and anyhow, people’s laughter never lined up quite right, given the lag time. Back then, he’d sometimes lean into this strangeness and have his students practice laughs on Zoom, trying out different ones, “just to remind ourselves that we were human beings.”

Even now, back to meeting in person, Goodman has noticed there is initially less of the chitchat and side talk that tells him a class is bonding. This closed-off behavior is partly the social rustiness of pandemic isolation, he figures, but it’s also students’ tendency to retreat into their devices, a socially accepted alternative to the discomfort of being with new people. But he’s trying to change it. “I feel like it’s my job,” Goodman says, “to reinvigorate the classroom with that social juice.”

If all of these students feel like an isolated individual in the classroom, they’re not going to learn as effectively as if they come and feel part of a learning community.

So what does he do? Like Kurushima, Goodman asks his students to learn one another’s names — in his case, by the end of their first week. He has each student create an “about me” slideshow, which they each post to their website portfolio. He then creates a treasure hunt that requires students to search through each other’s presentations.

He also has students use something from a classmate’s slide show in a subsequent assignment.

Goodman puts the students in groups to give each other feedback on their work, focusing on finding what is best in each other’s projects.

“When it works,” he says, “what happens is you get students who start to know things about one another.”

It worked for Bailey Davis, an elementary-education major who, during her sophomore year, took one of Goodman’s courses, “Build It! Design Technology and Elementary Steam Education” — an elective where education students explore hands-on projects they could use to teach kids later.

Davis, who expects to graduate in December, considers herself a quiet person in general. She spent her first year of college taking classes remotely, and when she took Goodman’s class after a semester of in-person learning, she still found it hard to talk with classmates. “So it was really nice to kind of learn about other people,” she says, “and not have it be all up to me.”

She remembers that students wrote down a few things about themselves, including a song they liked, on notecards. Goodman would revisit the notecards, she said — unlike some other professors who had students fill out cards and never followed up. He used their songs for a class playlist that was on while they built their hands-on projects.

For one project, groups were asked to build a roller coaster for a table-tennis ball with materials including a pegboard, bolts, and rubber bands — and make it go as slowly as possible. Davis’s group talked about using friction to make it hard for the ball to go up, as well as using gravity and changing the angle of the board so it was nearly flat. “Those things were brought up by different people,” she says, and their collective ideas and creativity took them further than she’d have gotten working alone. “Maybe you don’t know something that could be really beneficial in the project, but someone else does.”

This fall, Davis is serving as a student-teacher in a fourth-grade classroom. In that setting, creating a classroom community is everything. Why is college so different? Davis thinks it’s because college marks a transition to adulthood, to independence. That focus puts group work, and community, on the back burner.

But maybe, it doesn’t have to.

And maybe more professors are now primed to attend to these needs, says Peter Felten, executive director of the Center for Engaged Learning and assistant provost for teaching and learning at Elon University. “There’s an opportunity to see now as a moment where we could reset a little bit about what’s the heart of a college experience, for any student.”

Even on traditional, residential campuses where students may have more chances to connect, their classes have a distinctive role to play. “The classroom is an opportunity for students to get out of the dorm, to engage with each other and to engage with the instructor, and to work on goals,” says Sarah Rose Cavanagh, senior associate director of teaching and learning in the Center for Faculty Excellence at Simmons University, in Boston, who often writes for *The Chronicle*. In the talks she’s been giving lately,

Cavanagh, also an associate professor of practice in psychology, emphasizes that many of the things that support happiness and well-being are components of a well-run classroom, and that, ultimately, "a really well-run classroom can build mental health."

For the many faculty members who worry about students' mental health but also understand that they're not in a position to support it therapeutically, she says, it can be encouraging to hear that fulfilling their role as good teachers is, in itself, a way to help.

For some, the idea of building social connection in the classroom may conjure cheesy conference icebreakers or kindergarten circle time. But getting students to interact need not be organized around something separate from the work of the course, Cavanagh says. "In some ways, it is almost even better if it is content, because when you ask students to do those icebreakers and to share stuff, they kind of freeze up." Doing an activity in a group, or taking part in an intellectual discussion, can help meet students' social needs without asking them to reveal too much about themselves.

Lori Kayes and Devon Quick have designed the large-enrollment biology courses they teach at Oregon State University around active learning that happens in assigned small groups. That gives students a home base in a giant lecture hall.

"Of course people can reach out to other people in the class," says Kaitlyn Kim, a junior biochemistry and molecular biology major who serves as a learning assistant in an introductory course taught by Kayes. Still, "if you're already not super inclined to just put yourself out there and say, hey, let's work on this outside of class, it takes the pressure off of them. And I've definitely talked to students who have validated that."

I feel like it's my job to reinvigorate the classroom with that social juice.

That doesn't mean that these students necessarily go on to become close friends, Kim adds. "But that's fine. Being able to work with different people is really important." Even if you don't love being in a group, she says, you can still learn a lot from it.

Designing large courses around small groups takes effort — and it might not always be what students are expecting, either. Both Kayes and Quick emphasize the importance of teamwork so students understand the degree to which the science careers they're pursuing are collaborative. But that is not the only reason they're doing this. Collaborative work leads to better learning, says Quick. "I know it's worth the work because the types of things that they are able to synthesize together are amazing."

It wasn't like this before she taught with active learning and social connection. Quick says she is an excellent lecturer. "I can tell a story. I am so good at it," she says. The problem? Students didn't learn much from those lectures, as evidenced by their difficulty in applying what she told them. "They struggled to answer questions using graphs," she says.

Working through problems together is what has gotten students to understand the content of the course.

Asking students to work together in class is a hallmark of an active-learning classroom, but it's not the only way to use groups to build community. Since he became a professor in 2018, Francisco Gallegos has put students into small discussion groups and asked them to meet *outside* of class, using a format adapted from a consulting company where he had worked before.

Gallegos, an assistant professor of philosophy at Wake Forest University, teaches courses that are usually capped at either 18 or 28 students. To form his groups, he first meets individually with each student. Is this a student who wants to be challenged or one looking to feel more comfortable? Do they want to be in a team with students who share some traits or are they looking to broaden their horizons? Is there someone they really do or don't want to work with? He takes all of that into consideration.

Once the groups are formed, the setup is loose and student-led. They meet once a week for 40 minutes outside of class and talk about the course. Each student writes a reflection, which is graded for completion.

"It's the single most powerful thing that I do in the classroom," Gallegos says. "It's the thing students say was the most meaningful to their learning. And it's the thing that takes the least amount of actual work from me."

The discussion groups allow students to take ownership of their learning, Gallegos says, to have an intellectual connection with one another that isn't directly mediated by him. That's something many students come to college hungry for, he says, but don't always find.

When the groups go well, he says, "you end up having these amazing conversations, that you may not even ever have with the people you're closest to, your friends and family. And a lot of students say: This is what I thought college was all about."

Kylie Yorke, who graduated in May with a double major in philosophy and psychology, says being in a discussion group in one of Gallegos's courses allowed for deeper engagement in the material. Philosophy, Yorke says, asks "what guiding principles one should orient their life around. And that work cannot be done on a purely theoretical basis. That work has to be done on a personal, individual level where you're digesting content and applying it to your own life." In the discussion group, "we were able to really let our guards down and ask, How did this stick with you? Did you guys understand this? No, me neither. Or yes, this really stood out to me, and I want to focus more on this particular issue. Let's dive deeper."

Yorke was in a group with two other women, and they shared a real interest in philosophy and a dissatisfaction with the Greek life that dominates their campus. They bonded. But they also took that connection back to the broader class. Yorke's group came up with the idea of hosting a symposium for

the whole class at the end of the course, where they had music, food, and a philosophical discussion that lasted long after Gallegos left to take care of his child.

Jen Ebbeler was missing that kind of social connection. An associate professor of classics at the University of Texas at Austin, Ebbeler was excited to get back into the classroom after a research leave and to have a more normal teaching experience after all of those pandemic semesters. But then, she learned that the building that houses both her office and her department's standard seminar classroom was full of mold, and there wasn't another room available that met her needs. Disappointed, she shifted her first-year seminar course — which focuses on disability — online.

But Ebbeler had taught online even before the pandemic. And unlike during emergency remote instruction, students could meet up outside of class. So she built in assignments for the students to complete together, and encouraged them to do the assignments in person.

Ella Gault, an arts- and entertainment-technologies major in the course, recalls having coffee with two classmates — and staying long after they had completed their worksheet to keep talking. Gault, who spent a full year of high school taking classes online, says knowing her classmates has mattered. "It's one thing to have a professor talking through a video stream and then you just, like, just half pay attention. But if that connection is created, and you sort of learn to respect and admire your classmates, it makes the discussions more meaningful because you want to listen and respond. And it makes your connection to the content more meaningful because the people you're connected to have a connection to it."

Ebbeler's students have asked her if they could have one gathering in person as a full class. The plan is to have the last meeting in a classroom, with food.

To Ebbeler, the experience underscored that connection can happen, or not, in any class format. "The future is that we're going to be teaching more classes online," Ebbeler says. "Especially large lecture classes." Ebbeler, a proponent of universal design for learning, records all of her class sections as a matter of course. Some of her colleagues, though, resist this — in part because they think students might not come to class.

"They don't understand," she says, that "no, students come for the social part."

And students can do that no matter what modality the course is taught in. "There's no magic modality or number or shape of classroom or anything like that," Ebbeler says.

That growing recognition is part of a broader change. Traditionally, many professors have viewed their task as teachers as "to confirm the location of skills and knowledge in individual students' brains," says Lindsay Masland, director of transformative teaching and learning and a professor of psychology at Appalachian State. But that model has been challenged by the internet, which has lowered the value of

knowing information now that it's at everyone's fingertips, and, more recently, tools like ChatGPT that can pump out the kind of answer instructors often ask for to measure what students know and can do.

That has left at least some faculty members unclear about what is being accomplished in their classrooms, Masland says. "Maybe a way for us to at least try to respond to this existential crisis that's been created for us about our jobs is to say: What else could this be about?"

One answer is to focus less on having students prove what they know and more on improving their ability to use that knowledge to do something meaningful, together.

Beckie Supiano writes about teaching, learning, and the human interactions that shape them.

Students Crossing Boundaries

Rudeness, disruptions, unrealistic demands. Where to draw the line?

NOVEMBER 14, 2023

Marcela Alfaro-Córdoba began teaching introductory statistics at the University of California at Santa Cruz in the middle of the pandemic. Because she wanted to stay connected to her students, hundreds of whom she was teaching over Zoom, she set up a Discord channel for the course. The regular pings on her phone were alerts telling her that students had questions. Some of her students needed help with the material. But others had personal issues, and she found herself spending a lot of time navigating their challenges. “I was struck by how much attention they were needing,” she says. “At some point I couldn’t keep up with all the messages.”

But it was more than just the steady stream of requests that she found difficult. Alfaro-Córdoba, an assistant teaching professor, has had some run-ins with students who she felt tried to turn her policies on deadlines and grading, or their lack of preparation for exams, into a problem that she was expected to solve. One student got so upset that she wasn’t allowed to take a makeup exam at a different time that she complained to the head of the department, the dean, and some advisers that she wasn’t being given a fair chance.

“It’s something, sadly, I see more and more of,” Alfaro-Córdoba says. “And I don’t have any recommendations on how to solve it.”

Aggressive demands. Inappropriate classroom behaviors. Faculty members who feel pressured to be endlessly flexible. These and other challenges are becoming more common, says Jody Greene, associate campus provost for academic success at UC Santa Cruz. Greene has noticed that a growing number of faculty members are seeking help with classroom disruptions, sometimes well after they have spun out of control. Professors, Greene concluded, often believe that it is their responsibility to solve these problems on their own. And they worry — sometimes rightly — that if they resist student demands, they will be accused of being unreasonable.

Greene sees many issues driving these boundary-challenging behaviors, including a rise in mental-health challenges and a lack of interaction during the pandemic that left students underprepared for the social norms of college. Students’ growing use of social media, along with national political divides, has given some a warped view of appropriate classroom behaviors, Greene says. And a shifting power dynamic, in which students feel more comfortable advocating for their needs, has left some faculty members feeling uncertain about their authority.

“I often see students using the language of, ‘You need to be flexible, and you need to be more caring,’ which I think they’ve picked up from an institutional discourse that we are flexible and we are caring.

And we are," says Greene, who has designed a workshop in conjunction with the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Education to help professors navigate this terrain. "But people like me have warned for a long time that the discourse of flexibility will eventually come back to bite us."

What's happening at UC Santa Cruz is not unique, but it's not universal either. Administrators at other campuses offer varying accounts of student-conduct issues in the classroom. Some see no increase in faculty requests for help, while others report problematic behavior across campus. Two variables may be at play: when colleges returned to in-person learning, and how students navigated their high-school years.

Montclair State University, for example, pushed hard for a full return to campus in the fall of 2021. That year was "a low point," says Emily Isaacs, executive director of the Office for Faculty Excellence. "It was just exhausting." Professors spent months re-establishing academic expectations and scaling back the extreme flexibility of the pandemic's early days. Today, says Isaacs, "we're on the other side of that."

What I'm realizing is what faculty need these days, more than a checklist of how-tos, is a permission slip to do what makes sense in their context.

By contrast, faculty and staff members at California State University-Dominguez Hills have reported a wide range of behavioral problems this year, says Matthew Smith, senior associate vice president for student life. Students are struggling with academic expectations in the classroom: wearing AirPods the entire time, showing up 30 minutes late with food in hand, not turning in assignments but expecting professors to "bend over backwards" to help them pass.

In the first-year dorms, he says, there's been a problem with sexual harassment by young men. Female students, meanwhile, are increasingly getting into physical altercations over what Smith calls "high-school stuff," such as disputes over rumors or boys.

"We've seen more fights in the first five weeks of school than we've seen in the last two, three years combined," says Smith.

Unlike many campuses across the country, CSU-Dominguez Hills' students remained mostly online through the 2021-22 school year, Smith notes. "I think they just lost social interaction and social development and understanding how to deal with conflict." Meanwhile, local high schools were focused on trying to get students to graduate, and some of their policies didn't demand much accountability, he says. They allowed students to repeatedly redo work and miss deadlines, and used in-school suspensions for problematic behavior. That made it more difficult for students to adjust to college norms.

Smith has met with students in residence halls to hear from them firsthand and was struck by two things: The ones acting out were aloof and not willing to engage, while others spoke about a range of personal challenges. Students on his campus are predominantly low income and first generation. So while they don't come in with a sense of entitlement, he notes, "at times there's this level of, Well I'm going through this and therefore you should just understand and not hold me to these standards or expectations."

Smith plans to convene people across campus, including housing, student psychological services, and instructors of first-year courses, to figure out how best to deal with what they're seeing. The message he wants to convey to students: "Even though you're going through stuff, it doesn't absolve you of your responsibility. And we won't lower our standards for you. But we have all of these things that we can wrap around you."

If students struggle to stay on top of their academics, for example, student-affairs staff might talk to them about what else is going on in their lives. Perhaps they have a long commute, work long hours and have difficulty figuring out how much time to devote to coursework. The wraparound services could include academic coaching, help finding scholarships or on-campus jobs, and time-management workshops.

At Appalachian State University, Lindsay Masland, a director at the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for Student Success, says professors on campus seem to be both exasperated and perplexed. So the center has increased faculty development in two areas: understanding the student experience and being honest about where your boundaries are.

"What I'm realizing is what faculty need these days, more than a checklist of how-tos, is a *permission slip* to do what makes sense in their context," Masland writes in an email, "which often means that their teaching choices will and should look different than those of the person in the cubicle next to them."

Masland says they have not heard of anything that could be labelled as hostility from students — more like unrelenting frustration with professors, sometimes with good reason. For example, upon investigating student complaints about an instructor, Masland sometimes realizes the complaints have some merit, usually because class policies or assignment instructions were unclear.

Being clear and explicit — transparency — is the approach faculty developers and teaching experts favor, especially given students' changed expectations, the wide variety of rules and policies among professors, and the feeling — among everyone, it seems — of being overwhelmed.

"It's clear that stressed-out students and stressed-out faculty can struggle to communicate on high-stakes issues," notes E. Shelley Reid, executive director of engaged teaching at George Mason University's Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning.

Because it's often hard to determine what lies at the root of a classroom challenge, Reid says, she would rather focus on "generalizable strategies" that help in many different situations. Transparent course design is at the heart of that, she says, because it reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings and surprises. If you discover late in the semester that you're at risk of failing, or you waited until 2 a.m. to start an assignment that turned out to be much more complicated than you thought, "those are the spaces where a lot of us will send an intemperate email."

Transparent course design rests on the idea that explaining not only what your policies are but why you have them helps students feel confident in what is expected of them and how it benefits their learning. Transparency might include detailed information on deadlines and late work policies, how students will be assessed and why, and ground rules for classroom conduct. Individual assignments may also come with similar explanations of why they were designed in a certain way and what the instructor wants students to achieve.

If tense moments arise, faculty developers say, professors can refer to the syllabus or conduct codes, and remind students of the policies they had discussed.

Reid recently had a conversation with a faculty member who was approached by a student who had missed the first two exams and said that she needed to catch up on everything in the final three weeks of class. When the instructor said that was against her course policy, the student replied that another of her professors allowed students to complete their work anytime before the end of the semester. So, the student asked, why don't you?

To avoid conflicts like this in the future, the faculty member told Reid, she planned to set up a system in which students who fell behind would get a message reminding them about class policies and suggesting where to get academic help.

It's also important, Reid notes, for faculty members to talk to one another about what they consider reasonable course expectations. While such policies might vary from person to person, professors being challenged by students are less likely to feel surprised or undermined by their colleagues' practices. And when professors speak with students about their policies early in the semester, students are less likely to get frustrated by those differences.

"The more we are publicly talking about expectations and rationales," Reid says, "the better we are."

At UC Santa Cruz, faculty members are also hearing that it's easier to prevent a problem than manage one that's already out of control.

Since last academic year, Greene has been working with Ross Maxwell, deputy director of the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Education, to develop a workshop for faculty members on how to set boundaries with students to support learning. The session, which was first offered this fall to a group of new faculty members, is designed to give instructors a framework for why setting boundaries is

beneficial for everyone, practical advice on how to respond to boundary-pushing behavior, and scenarios taken from real life that they can discuss.

Ad hoc flexibility without consideration of its effect on learning can lead to worse outcomes for students.

In one case, for example, a faculty member learned about a Discord channel that some students had created. The problem: They were sharing quiz answers and making rude comments about the professor, which eventually got back to the professor. Other cases involved a student making a random offensive comment in class, and a faculty member being approached by a panicked student as office hours ended, demanding immediate help with an assignment due the next day and saying that they were paying a lot in tuition. In each of these cases, Greene and Maxwell ask workshop participants to discuss how best to respond.

Ideally, says Greene, future workshops will be done with entire departments so that faculty members can see that they're not alone in their challenges and create a support system for each other if confronted in the classroom. Younger faculty, women, and instructors from underrepresented groups are more likely to see these sorts of challenges to their authority, Greene notes.

One of the messages Greene wants to convey to faculty: Ad hoc flexibility without consideration of its effect on learning can lead to worse outcomes for students. It's better to build it into a course rather than trying to determine on a case-by-case basis whether students have a "good enough" reason to, say, be granted an extension or an excuse for absence.

Maxwell, who has been working with Greene to solve classroom behavior problems since the pandemic started, says that the types of interruptions and inappropriate behaviors have shifted since the return to in-person learning, having been shaped by online interactions.

One conversation stood out to him. A student was called in to discuss inappropriate behavior. The student had been using a Discord channel for class, and a Discord channel with his friends.

"Essentially he said, 'The difference between joking with my friends in a way that would probably be inappropriate during classes is a click. It's less than a quarter inch away. I click on one, I'm talking with my friends and we're laughing about what I'm learning in class and I'm maybe saying things that wouldn't be appropriate in class. And then I click back into the class, and I'm back in the classroom. Those blurred. I started just acting the same way with my friends and in class. And what my friends thought was funny was not funny in class.'

"Students are having a harder time making that distinction," says Maxwell, "like what is a professional boundary to have in an academic setting versus when you're not in a classroom setting?"

Re-establishing boundaries may be a lengthy process. Faculty members may find that they get dinged on student evaluations for allegedly demanding too much from their students. Or they might find that their colleagues tell them it's easier to acquiesce to students' requests than risk a complaint. Such scenarios have happened at UC Santa Cruz. Still, professors who have made changes have seen results.

After that first exhausting spring, Alfaro-Córdoba, the statistics professor, revamped her own policies.

She stopped using Discord and began directing her students to a communication tool in her learning-management system, known as Ed Discussion. That allowed her and her teaching assistants to work together to respond to questions and comments, which helped balance out workloads. It also tamped down on the informality she saw on Discord, where, she says, students would sometimes behave as if they were commenting on a YouTube video. On Ed Discussion, students knew that while their posts might appear anonymously to their classmates, the professor and the TAs would see their name. That's especially important in very large classes, she notes, where her enrollments are upwards of 200 students.

Alfaro-Córdoba also included in her syllabus the hours that she is available to meet with students and how long they should expect to wait before she responds to queries. On the first day of class she reviews her syllabus in full and explains why she has certain policies, noting that sticking to deadlines helps prevent them from falling behind. She has also found that she regularly needs to remind students about all of these things throughout the term.

So far, she says, these changes have worked well. "The new generation understands reasons, but they don't understand rules," says Alfaro-Córdoba. "When you put your rules into a context, some of them are really thankful for it. But authority just for the sake of authority this generation really hates."

Beth McMurtrie is a senior writer for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, where she writes about the future of learning and technology's influence on teaching. In addition to her reported stories, she helps write the weekly Teaching newsletter about what works in and around the classroom.

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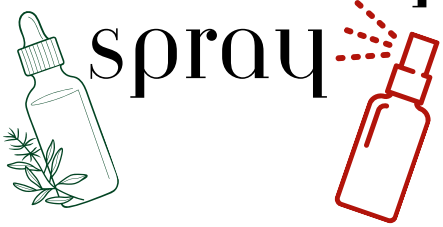

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