[http://www.isetl.org/ijtle/](http://www.isetl.org/ijtle/)

   a. **Published abstract:** Every class has a first day, yet many professors only read the syllabus to students rather than more intentionally leveraging the day to set up understandings that enhance learning and classroom management. Logic, experience, and research indicate that it is not just content expertise that matters to student experience and learning: it is also the environment that the faculty member creates—ideally engaging students as active participants. This paper will increase awareness of the importance of planning and performing the first day, review alternative first day approaches in terms of the primary goals they satisfy — content connection, interpersonal connection, student face needs, motivation, and expectation setting — and provide a detailed outline, and rationale, for a flexible, transdisciplinary first day exercise, the Three Boards Activity, that offers benefits to both the students and faculty member and is adaptable to any size class. Handled thoughtfully, the first day can do more than convey basic information: it can also set the tone and model optimal attitudes and behavior for the classroom.

   b. **Why this is important:** Despite the plethora of research on the importance of using the first day of class to connect with students, set expectations, and build a community, it is commonly known that first day is just for passing out the syllabus and dismissing the class. A successful first day of class can make a lasting impression for remainder of the semester. This paper not only addresses the importance of effectively using the first day of class, but it also provides a flexible activity that is readily available for instructors to use on that first class meeting in any discipline.


   a. **Excerpt:** Power and authority for women of color is elusive and not entirely gained through professional competence or faculty status. Frequently, helping students to develop critical tools to identify systemic inequities does not translate to students’ consciousness of their own hegemonic biases. Students, in fact, are not shy about asking other faculty to validate what women of color faculty teach (de la Riva – Holly 2012; Harlow 2003; Williams 1991). While interactions between women of color faculty and white, often male, students and colleagues have been studied, fraught scenarios also emerge within the intricacies of expectant similarity between women of color faculty and students of color, an expectation intensifies for faculty teaching in disciplines and classrooms where social justice content and approaches foreground their “outsider - within” status (Collins 2000, 11). The shared or perceived alienation of women of color faculty draws similarly marginalized students as mentees, just as the shared or hoped for opportunity for social, economic, and political mobility establishes commonality (Acker and Feuerverger 1996; Bellas 1999; Constanti and Gibbs 2013). The combined conflicting pressures of expectant race, gender, and class identification with women of color faculty by students in these contexts generates abundant additional labor for women faculty of color who already must perform
collegiality and professionalism more enthusiastically to meet unstated affective requirements (Bellas 1999).

b. **Why this is important:** Audiences beyond women of color often do not grasp the entirety of the challenges faced by faculty women of color, and indeed the stealth workload imposed upon this sub-population by cultural forces. The article implies similar forces might be at work to other sub-populations of faculty who fall outside the politically dominant one. To be equitable, in fact, colleagues and departments might need to consider strategies that take social and cultural constructs into consideration when attempting to evaluate their co-workers fairly and in full context.


b. **Why this is important:** As USF becomes more diverse (in terms of students, faculty, and staff) with each passing semester, the relevance of developing cultural competency around the campus is clear. This need for tools, strategies, and initiatives to foster cultural competency also plays into USF’s drive for increasing student success – for all students. Many of the steps towards building cultural competency need to occur at the institution level. However, as faculty, we can make efforts in our classrooms and in our teaching to allow for students (and faculty) to reflect on and integrate what they’ve learned and observed.

   a. **Published abstract:** People are often told to find their passion, as though passions and interests are preformed and must simply be discovered. This idea, however, has hidden motivational implications. Five studies examined implicit theories of interest—the idea that personal interests are relatively fixed (fixed theory) or developed (growth theory). Whether assessed or experimentally induced, a fixed theory was more likely to dampen interest in areas outside people’s existing interests (Studies 1–3). Individuals endorsing a fixed theory were also more likely to anticipate boundless motivation when passions were found, not anticipating possible difficulties (Study 4). Moreover, when it became difficult to engage in a new interest, interest flagged significantly more for people induced to hold a fixed rather than a growth theory of interest (Study 5). Urging people to find their passion may lead them to put all their eggs in one basket but then to drop that basket when it becomes difficult to carry.

   b. **Why this is important:** This study can help instructors when confronted with students who lose interest in their disciplines. Instead of seeing students’ interest as something innate, we should look at interests as something we can all cultivate in our students and thus help them cope when confronted with difficult material.


   a. **Published abstract:** Learning styles (LS) have dominated educational practice since their popularization in the 1970s. Studies have shown that they are accepted by more than 90% of teachers worldwide. However, LS have also received extensive criticism from researchers and academics, due to the poor theoretical justification of the theory, their problematic measurement, and the lack of systematic studies supporting them. The present study tested the hypothesis that teachers' and students' assessment of preferred LS should correspond. Moreover, it tested whether teachers' judgment of LS is driven by the students' IQ. Both questions were studied for the first time in a systematic fashion within LS research in primary school pupils. Fifth and sixth grade pupils (n = 199) were asked to self-assess their preferred LS, while their teachers were asked to provide their own assessment on individual pupils' LS. No relationship was found between pupils’ self-assessment and teachers' assessment, suggesting that teachers cannot assess the LS of their students accurately. Moreover, students' intelligence was not found to drive teachers' assessment of their LS. This study adds to the body of evidence that is skeptical of the adoption of LS in mainstream education.

   b. **Why this is important:** This study adds to the growing body of literature against the use of learning styles in education. It concludes that identification of learning styles, as they are currently understood and used within education, is unreliable and should constitute an additional reason why teachers should abandon the use of learning styles in instruction. Instructors should turn instead to the use of evidence-based practices and the application of cognitive science research.
   
   
   a. **Published abstract:** Most research related to learning in groups focuses on the unit of the group and/or group members. However, students may benefit from crossing the boundaries of their own group, as students in different groups may provide access to new, nonredundant knowledge and opportunities for learning. Whether boundary crossing between groups is beneficial for learning and academic performance has received limited conceptual and empirical attention. Using social network analysis and structural equation modeling, we contrasted pre/post network developments among 693 students (132 groups) across 4 modules at a UK business school. We examined whether it is better for students to invest in social relations in groups to learn and enhance academic performance or to (continue to) invest in social relations outside groups. Our findings indicated that students seemed to learn more from learning relations outside their group than from their own group members. Students with more intergroup relative to intragroup learning relations performed better on module assessments and throughout the academic year than students with more intragroup learning relations. Boundary crossing and intergroup learning deserves more empirical attention and experimentation on how to balance boundary crossing and effective group learning strategies.

   b. **Why this is important:** More often than not, students loathe being made to work in groups. Yet, we know that there are many advantages to group work, in terms of both building students’ knowledge and developing their soft skills. The drawbacks of group work often stem from ineffective structuring – of the assignment and of the groups. This study suggests that one solution to enhancing group work is to allow students to practice more intergroup learning – that is, not restrict them to interacting only with their fellow group members. The social relations students form with their classmates play a large role in the success of group work. Experimenting with the dynamics of the groups in your course (how the groups are assigned, whom they can work with, etc.) could potentially lead to increased student satisfaction.

   
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   a. **Published abstract:** Many students and educators know that sleep is important to learning, yet there exists a gap between their knowledge and behavior. For example, fewer than 10% of students sleep 8 hr before final exams. In the context of two undergraduate courses on sleep (N = 34), students could earn extra credit if they averaged ≥8.0 hr of sleep during final exams week. Sleep/wake patterns were monitored objectively using actigraphy. The 24 students who opted in to the challenge averaged 8.5 hr of sleep (n = 17 succeeded). Short sleep (≤6.9 hr) occurred on only 11% of nights, significantly less than early-semester baseline (51%) and comparison group (65%) data. On the final exam, students who slept ≥8.0 hr performed better than students who opted out or slept ≤7.9 hr, even after controlling for prefinal grades. The 8-hr sleep challenge provides proof of principle that many students can maintain optimal sleep while studying, without sacrificing test performance.

   b. **Why this is important:** Many studies highlight the importance of sleep for memory and learning, yet too often students sacrifice sufficient sleep for cramming. This study connects sleep with final exam performance in a way that will, hopefully, convince students to take the “eight hour challenge” and get a good night’s sleep; not just during finals, but all semester long.

   a. **Published abstract:** The technology policies included on instructors’ syllabi vary greatly and, in some cases, may unfavorably influence students’ perceptions of the instructor. To examine this hypothesis, we randomly assigned college students enrolled in psychology courses at two different institutions (ND 163) to groups in which they viewed different syllabi for a community psychology course. The syllabi varied by the hypothetical instructor’s technology policy (encouraging of appropriate technology use in the classroom, discouraging of all technology use, or a mixture of both) and instructor gender. Results showed that students rated instructors similarly on the Competency/Communication factor across all conditions but rated them significantly lower on the Rapport factor when the syllabus included a discouraging technology policy. Rapport ratings were also associated with students’ self-reported dependence on technology. High instructor Rapport was associated with high levels of students’ technology dependency in the encouraging technology policy condition (r = .29, p < .05), but low levels of technology dependency in the discouraging condition (r = -.31, p < .05). Our findings suggest that if instructors include technology policies on their syllabi that restrict inappropriate technology use, they should also indicate situations in which technology use is appropriate.

   b. **Why this is important:** Students’ use of technology is of great concern as it is shown to impact students’ grades and overall learning. Banning it altogether might also have negative consequences. This article presents a nuanced view on this issue and offers practical advice on how to best address it.


   a. **Excerpt:** Students study the research behind different learning strategies. Take cramming, for example. Students learn that, while people estimate they learn better studying all at once versus spacing out their learning, studies show the opposite. Similarly, people perform better when they test themselves on what they know while they are studying, as opposed to reading the same material over and over. Students are encouraged to put these strategies into practice in their other classes as they take the course, which has been open to all students since 2015. Cleary says one particular comment from a student perfectly encapsulates its approach: “I’ve been implementing these techniques & it doesn’t feel like it is going to have any effect,” the student wrote. “Then I take a quiz or a test & realize how much I’ve learned, & it’s almost like the learning just sneaks up on you. It’s like, I would call it, sneaky learning."

   b. **Why this is important:** Faculty increasingly recognize the importance of the science of learning, especially as it applies to memory, and attempt to apply the principles to their own curricular structure (such as making all quizzes cumulative, which enforces the spacing of studying). This article provides validation that students also recognize that learning has taken place, albeit in a “sneaky” fashion.

a. **Published abstract:** Research on interactive learning space classrooms has reported that instructors and students find them engaging, and engagement is expected to increase learning outcomes. Positive findings about interactive classrooms, though, are often confounded with active learning pedagogy since instructors who teach in interactive classrooms tend to also promote active learning pedagogy. More research is needed to tease apart learning gains from the instructional design, classroom context, and the related incorporation of technology. This study examined the relationship between learning gains and classroom context (traditional and interactive learning space) in a pretest/posttest design and reviewed student survey responses about learning experiences. Participants were enrolled in one of two sections of a course. Both groups were taught by the same instructor using active learning pedagogy with the same activities, materials, and assignments. The results showed that classroom context did not result in differences in students learning overall. Some findings pointing to subtle differences, however, indicate that the interactive classroom could have made the classroom instruction more effective and efficient.

b. **Why this is important:** Interactive learning physical space can affect students’ learning, however, no significant effect on group learning outcomes, learning gains and in-class attendance was found in this study when controlling for pedagogy (i.e. same instructor using interactive teaching). The results indicate that when interactive pedagogical approach was consistent, the learning space by itself did not make a significant difference in the learning gains.
Bonus: The 5 Best (Education-related) TED Talks of 2018

“How to Tame your Wandering Mind” (18:09)
TED Description: Amishi Jha studies how we pay attention: the process by which our brain decides what's important out of the constant stream of information it receives. Both external distractions (like stress) and internal ones (like mind-wandering) diminish our attention's power, Jha says -- but some simple techniques can boost it. "Pay attention to your attention," Jha says. 
https://www.ted.com/talks/amishi_jha_how_to_tame_your_wandering_mind#t-351884

“The Surprising Link between Stress and Memory” (4:47)
TED Description: You spend weeks studying for an important test. On the big day, you wait nervously as your teacher hands it out. You're working your way through, when you're asked to define "ataraxia." You know you've seen the word before, but your mind goes blank. What just happened? Elizabeth Cox details the complex relationship between stress and memory.
https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_cox_the_surprising_link_between_stress_and_memory#t-278547

“3 Kinds of Bias that Shape Your Worldview” (12:22)
TED Description: What shapes our perceptions (and misperceptions) about science? In an eye-opening talk, meteorologist J. Marshall Shepherd explains how confirmation bias, the Dunning-Kruger effect and cognitive dissonance impact what we think we know -- and shares ideas for how we can replace them with something much more powerful: knowledge.
https://www.ted.com/talks/j_marshall_shepherd_3_kinds_bias_that_shape_your_worldview

“The Case for Curiosity-Driven Research” (9:20)
TED Description: Seemingly pointless scientific research can lead to extraordinary discoveries, says physicist Suzie Sheehy. In a talk and tech demo, she shows how many of our modern technologies are tied to centuries-old, curiosity-driven experiments -- and makes the case for investing in more to arrive at a deeper understanding of the world.
https://www.ted.com/talks/suzie_sheehy_the_case_for_curiosity_driven_research/discussion

“How to Disagree Productively and Find Common Ground" (14:57)
TED Description: Some days, it feels like the only thing we can agree on is that we can't agree -- on anything. Drawing on her background as a world debate champion, Julia Dhar offers three techniques to reshape the way we talk to each other so we can start disagreeing productively and finding common ground -- over family dinners, during work meetings and in our national conversations.
https://www.ted.com/talks/julia_dhar_how_to_disagree_productively_and_find_common_ground