

# Keep Students Focused on Class Content

## Overview

At times, instructors may find that students are distracted. Here are some tips to capture and maintain the attention of your students.

- **Ask a challenging question at the start of class.** Novel or challenging questions generate interest in a topic or a class. Consider using the first five minutes of class to pose a complex or challenging question/scenario related to the class to your students. You could base the question or scenario on the reading for the class that day, helping students grapple with a topic with which they might have some familiarity. Elevating a student's interest in a topic before a class increases the chances that they will pay attention to the class itself.
- **Tell stories from your professional experiences.** Our brains are programmed to understand and remember stories better than most other types of information. Draw on your professional experiences to tell stories related to the class content. This simple yet powerful technique has the potential to achieve several results; it can help students relate better to you both as a professional and as an individual, which will likely increase their motivation to learn. In addition, since stories are a particularly interesting way of processing information, they can help students learn and recall class content effectively.
- **Ask students to share stories from their experiences.** Encourage students to share stories related to the topic you are teaching. This strategy draws students into the class dynamic because it indicates to them that you value their experiences. This practice will also lead students to become more familiar with one another, which can create a strong sense of class community. Students who feel connected to their classmates are more likely to report feelings of belonging and tend to be more attentive and likely to participate in class.
- **End every class with a five-minute activity.** One way to ensure that students retain what they have learned is to allocate five minutes at the end of each class for students to write, in their own words, the 'biggest take homes' from the class session. This requires them to pay attention in class, retain the information, and strengthen their ability to recall it. An example of a closing activity is provided on the next page.

## References:

Rosegard, E & Wilson, J. (2013). Capturing Students' Attention: An Empirical Study. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 13 (5). pp. 1-20

