



Quality Teaching and Learning in Graduate Programs

There is a disparity in literature in the amount of attention given to undergraduate education and student engagement, when compared to graduate education (Pontius & Harper, 2006; Hartnett & Katz, 1977). The following characteristics broadly summarize literature related to creating quality educational experiences for graduate students.

Focus on Knowledge Application and Integration:

Experiences that focus on knowledge acquisition through the creation of opportunities for students to synthesize, connect, and apply their learning, foster engagement in graduate programs. Academic coursework is viewed as beneficial by graduate students when combined with practical application, as it creates an opportunity to synthesize prior knowledge and academic learning through application in diverse environments (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Melnyk, Fineout-Overholt, Sadler, & Green-Hernandez, 2008; Bensimon, 2009).

Create Opportunities for Quality Interactions with Faculty Members and Peers:

Graduate students suggest that quality interaction with faculty and peers is important to their success in graduate school. Quality interactions with faculty include experiences such as prompt feedback on their work and providing sufficient opportunities to engage in interactions that increase their intellectual abilities (Hartnett & Katz, 1977; Bensimon, 2009). Arbaugh (2000) and Pontius & Harper (2006) also emphasize the importance of providing meaningful opportunities for student interaction in graduate courses, in order to both enhance student learning experiences and to build a positive learning community.

Provide Practical and Relevant Learning Experiences:

Designing practical and relevant learning experiences enables graduate students to become actively engaged in their learning, and see points of transfer between their education and future practice. Providing educationally purposeful opportunities for engagement creates opportunities for graduate students to become reflective learners who in addition to acquiring theoretical knowledge, can apply learning in practice (Bensimon, 2009). Course work that is seen as relevant to their future roles is also key for graduate students' transition into practice (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). For example, the use of case studies, projects and problem-based learning (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Johnson, 2013), provide authentic opportunities for students to apply learning.

Actively Engage Learners:

The use of active and interactive teaching methods has been shown to strengthen graduate student learning experiences in both online and face-to-face environments (Bensimon, 2009; Bollinger & Martindale, 2004; Morey, 2001; Arbaugh, 2000). Interactive learning strategies may include activities such as: small group and paired discussions, online discussion forums, case studies, role play, debates, in-class peer review and critiques, problem sets, and collaborative problem-solving.

Set Clear Expectations:

Setting clear and high expectations ensures graduate students are aware of what is expected from them throughout their courses and program of study which keeps them purposefully engaged (Bensimon, 2009). On the curriculum level, this involves ensuring intentional course sequencing to support students' learning progression throughout their program of study which helps students make necessary connections about and across various courses (Beebe, Mottet, & Roach, 2012). Having this clarity of expectations throughout their course learning experiences also fosters autonomy and responsibility for learning, as graduate students become more self-directed and take greater control of their progress (Freeman, Chambers, & Newton, 2016).

Design Effective Assessment:

Appropriate assessment strategies support learning and academic growth by providing evidence of student's strengths and abilities, as well as provide an understanding of areas for improvement (Freeman, Chambers, & Newton, 2016). Graduate students also note the importance of receiving prompt and effective feedback on their work and seeing clear alignment between assessment and expectations to be successful in their learning as graduate students (Hartnett & Katz, 1977; Anderson & Swazey, 1998). Building on this understanding can help instructors design assessment strategies that improve the success of student learning in graduate programs.

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