GQ: What do successful students have in common?

What is your definition of a “successful” student?

When asked what defines a ‘successful’ student all participants had an opinion. A common theme amongst their responses is that being a successful student means having some goals and fulfilling those goals. Other definitions included, “one who gets a job in the industry they’ve decided to study,” “one who knows by graduation what exactly they want,” and “knowing at the end of study if he or she is able to follow what he or she wants.” Many of the participants defined a successful student by what they achieve or are working to achieve after graduation. A few participants mentioned ideas that were more focused on the time the students are enrolled in school such as, “one who thinks critically about information given to them and one who takes responsibility for their learning.” One participant who works mainly with graduate students said someone who is resourceful is successful. “They know why they are there and they know what they want out of the graduate program.”

What does SF State do to assist students in their goal toward graduation? What doesn’t SF State do?

The next question the moderator asked was what does SF State to do or not do to assist the students in their goal towards graduation. Immediately one participant mentioned money - “More money, more professors, more money for students.” He also mentioned that fellowships could improve the assistance the university provides students. Two other participants also mentioned advising structure.

One participant gave an example: “Freshman come in and don’t get effective advising that points them in the right direction in terms of what classes to take and which department can help them. My department, broadcasting, ends up with students who have been through 2 or 3 majors by the time they figure out broadcasting is the one for them. I think had they received more rigorous advising that that would help them get out faster.” Another participant agreed with this, again, based on personal experience: “The university lets the student start and they take all kinds of random classes and in the 3rd year they decide, ‘okay, I want to go for a business major.’ They come and they fail Finance, Accounting, etc. because they didn’t take Math, Accounting…classes that would help them. Students don’t know. They haven’t taken a single element class that would help them get to this major. It would fall into advising [to] explain to the students they shouldn’t just take random classes but more think what do they want to major in and strive to take a group of classes that will help them towards graduation. They didn’t really plan properly - no one told them that if you want to graduate in 5 years you need to select your major, for example in the 2nd year don’t wait until the 4th year or 5th year.”

There was general agreement that a better advising on which classes to take, in which order, and for what major will help the students graduate more quickly.

What about admissions, grad requirements, are degree requirements clear?

When asked about different factors that play into assisting students with graduation, such as admissions grad requirements and clarity of degree requirements, the participants’ comments went back to advising and also issues with the registration process. Some things mentioned about the registration process were to streamline the process and put more online: “Are forms available to you? How much is online? I mean it feels like sometimes when I deal with paper forms I think this is ridiculous that were not more systemized online. Things like that that I think have a trickledown effect and everything feels streamlined.
And you can be in control of decisions; you don’t have to wait between the 8 and 4 hour to try to get a hold of to get someone live.”

Another participant called the registration system ‘broken,’ “the broken registration system where students can register for classes without taking the prerequisites for that class and that is enormous because we as professors spend so much time kicking people out of classes because they don’t have the prerequisites.” The participant suggested that, “having more online forms and streamlining the whole process and fixing the registration would get students out faster.”

In regards to advising, one participant suggested having the student go see their department advisor up front rather than their GE advisor. “It sounds like they come in and they first go to GE advisors, are told to take all GE classes upfront, don’t show up until junior year to get lower division requisites and they want to be out in 2 or 3 years, and I think it’s a problem because we have students who if they were just given the right information up front because we have a lot of students who don’t know what they want to do we also have a lot of students who know what they want to do so we should be supporting them to get them out as quickly as possible. I think that means having them go see advisors in their department so you can get them into the department and I think it’s great when you can actually balance major classes with your GE classes so you don’t have this top heavy course load.”

Every participant agreed that the registration process and advising structure is hindering students rather than assisting them in reaching graduation.

What factors are the most relevant when students do not do well in your classes (program and/or major)?

The next question was what factors are the most relevant when students do not do well in a class. The first participant noted that in her class, motivation was the real issue. She found that students who did not do well in prerequisite courses tended to do poorly in her course. “So either they already have a job and couldn’t care less about the degree or they have family issues or who knows what is going on. So it’s usually not related to the university itself- I would say the lack of motivation makes students not succeed in my class. It’s to a much lesser degree, if they passed some critical prerequisite with a very low grade like a C- and then they come to my class, of course they can’t do well because the class is already demanding so they have to put a lot of effort to catch up…but this is less of a problem usually.”

Another participant agreed that motivation is a real issue and is due to life circumstances: “Serious life circumstances are really getting in the way with of schooling and part of it has to do with the economy and find out they can’t turn their paper in because they don’t have a home to sit and work on their paper or their husband has to work more and they don’t have child care anymore and have to drop out of their classes… but a lot of these motivational issues are a result of a lot of the climate right now in California which is making people make the awful choice between education and just surviving and its sometimes remarkable the type of students that are struggling who normally wouldn’t be.”

This led a participant to bring up financial aid – all the participants agreed that more financial aid help would allow students to do better in classes because they would have more time to contribute to their schooling. This participant has witnessed the lack of financial support cause students who would normally excel fall behind the rest. “I’ve also seen students who are overloading and taking 19, 21 units so they can be done and that’s putting a very serious strain on those students. They just don’t perform as well when they’re taking too many classes.”
Do other people have experience of students not having adequate math and basic writing skills?

When the question of whether the participants have experienced students not having adequate math and basic writing skills, all heads instantly nodded in agreement - many students to not possess adequate math and oral communication skills. One participant brought up a business communication course that is now online. “Especially the business school, it’s a big problem. We used to have many sections in the communication class which, now is in one big section. It’s online. Students don’t get opportunity to practice; no one’s grading their essays so basically they come with no communication skills. “

How can the university remove barriers to success?

The group was then asked how the university can remove barriers to success. One participant said to rethink the general education strategy by focusing on the question of “what skills do students need across the board to be successful members of society once they get a degree from San Francisco State?” She went back to the issue of students not being prepared in writing and math, “Maybe this whole notion of general education should be rethought to include more writing and more math, more targeted.” Other participants agreed that writing was a huge barrier.

Another participant supported this by saying: “I agree with the writing aspect. I think in Biology we have poor performance because, (a) their writing skills and even their oral communication skills are poor and [(b)] we don’t have time to work with them. So we are doing a curriculum change in biology where we are hopefully going to have writing in science class.”

A participant also made a comment regarding the GE strategy: “I think the GE revision is a fabulous idea. I mean health education has already done that with metropolitan health academies where basic skills are integrated from freshman and sophomore years and that’s an incredible model, but I think you have to look at intensity of faculty support; faculty training and we are being told to collapse classes not because we think it’s a good idea. I think it’s a cautionary tale at the same time you want that skill building to happen but not to be supporting your faculty.”

GQ: Are our remediation efforts successful?

Do you think our remediation efforts are successful? Why or why not?

The moderator then asked if SF State’s remediation efforts are successful or not. One participant, who works in the Biology department, said writing is more of an issue than math in biology. Another participant, who teaches English, discussed the different profiles of students she is faced with and where some of their writing troubles come from: “I teach second year composition, the composition for multilingual speakers, which these are all non-native speakers in English. I think their issues are unlike the ones you will find in the native speaker program but more varied. You’re seeing products of high school system where they were struggling then and that we’ve adopted that problem. That is something that I think we can’t solve on our own, it needs to be some sort of local effort around where do these students belong. Are they best served by the community college system or are they going to be best served by us. In some cases we’ve taken them and they probably could have done better in community college but they’re here now and I’m not necessarily that quick to handle their needs, and then you have international students with very strong academic skills but need the attention and then there’s problem everything in between but if you don’t recognize there’s different profiles then you’re going to slap the 214 on it and I think of it as a bias. I think we have a great English department and they do a great job, but when the other demands or have less time and they double the size of classes it just won’t happen as effectively.”
GQ: In what ways are our students not ready for college or specific majors?

In what ways are our students not ready for university study?

When asked in what ways are students not ready for university study, again the ongoing issue of critical thinking, writing communication, and oral communication are seen as problems among all participants. One participant brought up money: “It maybe goes to what the university can provide us - which is more money. So in departments we offer classes that are directed towards writing in the particular field because for me a lot of the lack of writing skill has to do with their ability to put reports together and I don’t expect the English department to spend time working on that. “

Another participant questioned testing before a student enters the university: “I’m not really sure if there are any English writing tests before the American students enter? I noticed that you can’t tell, at least from my class, from an assignment, whether this was a foreign student who writes poorly or an English student who speaks perfect English but they can’t put a flat sentence together without messing something. But is there any way to check who needs this remediation? Because I have the feeling they should check everybody.”

Another faculty member felt students were not getting the type of help at SF State that other universities are able to offer. She spoke about the necessity of writing in a discipline: “Who tells you how to write a biology report? I mean even in the English department, for a degree in teaching English to speakers of other languages we have a graduate writing class. I mean you’d think these students would come in and have a lock on these skills but they don’t. The school assumes since they graduated from high school and passed the exit exam they must have some academic skills. I would still put more emphasis on what supports are here. Let’s look at what dollar amount, what number of hours they’re guaranteed in terms of academic writing support. It’s not comparable to what other students get at other universities.”

Yet another participant went back to the idea that the university needs more money: “Maybe again the answer is money. I mean money is time - more time to prepare classes, read along, and work in groups - To prepare students for an autonomy work.”

There was an overall consensus that money and more institutionalized support for the department and university level are imperative for helping students succeed.

GQ: To what degree is the university prepared to support all students?

Is the University prepared to support all students?

There was agreement by all participants that the university needs more financial resources for students in order to be able to support all students. A few participants felt the current economic conditions are prohibiting SF State from being able to support all students. One person in support of this said: “[T]he conditions right now are enabling us to meet the needs of a certain kind of student- that certain kind of student probably gets support from another place. Probably has a parent that can support them some way, or themselves and they are autonomous and can somehow can figure it out but that’s not what this university is about –they would be doing well anywhere.”

Another participant suggested that the university accept fewer students: “[T]he decision to accept fewer students is arguably a step in the right direction to be able to serve all students when we reduce the number of all students the assumption is that we will be able to better serve them because the resources have been cut and faculty will have fewer students to worry about hopefully but I don’t know if this
department has fewer students. Will the business department? Will it be able to revive the business communication class? Will it be able to address all of these resource issues we have? It’s a very tough…”

One participant felt the university is in fact supporting all students: “I was thinking that the university is in a sense prepared to serve all students. For example, we have a very good IT department. At least we don’t discriminate between disabled students. I think we are among the leaders in California, if not in the U.S.” Other participants agreed with this comment. She believed that streamlining the process and putting more online would help with this even further. A participant brought up the university policy, that was recently created, which says a student can only attempt to take a class twice and the negative affect it may have on the student that struggles. She said: “That student may be deserving. This may be their last chance to get quality education and yet we are saying ‘why don’t you go somewhere else, figure it out for a while, then you can come back to us as a junior.’ Let’s hope it works out like that, but I’m thinking in other respects it could be sending them the complete opposite message.”

GQ: What are the current learning styles and preferences of the students?

Students now use more electronic communication (Facebook, Twitter, texting, etc.) than ever before. Does this affect how they study and learn?

When asked if the increased usage of electronic communication amongst students affects how they study and learn, the consensus was ‘yes it does.’ However, there was debate as to whether electronic communication worked as an advantage or disadvantage for the students. One thing mentioned is that students do everything online. The use of Power Point was also brought up.

One participant commented on this idea: “I think there’s definitely advantages, but on the other hand the fact that everything electronically handed to them on a silver platter can be problematic.” She brought up the university not having a library as an issue as well “the fact that we don’t have a library has not been addressed yet - the fact that they don’t really have a central library to go and pick up books - that is affecting how they study. But on the other hand I don’t want to discredit this generation; just because they do a lot of social networking doesn’t mean that they can’t be really good students.”

Another participant commented: “[A] fabulous tool in the hands of someone who is not able to be resourceful and self directed it’s not going to be an effective tool. So to look at how some students, you know, they’re getting your slides because they want to study and review and look at some ideas more closely, is different than someone not coming to class and [saying, ‘can you just send me your slides.’ Well then you’re not here and if you’re not here you’re not participating in class which is different then. So I think technology is wonderful I think it’s the best in the CSU. The IT dept has some great tools for both faculty and students, but if we have students who are not demonstrating some level of self direction it’s just going to be a way to loosely slap things together rather than really fuel their learning.”

Overall, technology affects how students learn and depending on how the technology is incorporated into the classroom, this may be an advantage or disadvantage to the student.

What are your experiences using classroom technologies in general?

The initial reaction to this question was overall disappointment in SF State’s lack of a proper library. One participant said: “Books. I’m really stuck with the old technology. This is lacking for me and lacking for them. If they like to study along depends on our library that we don’t have. They don’t have the book the experience to go and take the book - this is a serious problem on technology.” Another said, “I think once they leave campus there’s either they don’t have a home to study at or there’s other priorities at home and
they can’t get the work done and so I’m glad you brought the library up because if we had a library or even just more areas for students to work in groups.”

**Has using newer technologies to support your teaching changed in the last 10 years? – the past 5 or fewer years?**

When asked if using newer technologies to support teaching has changed over the years, one participant immediately said “no,” the other two who responded said “yes.” One said there are now more resources available to use in real time. The other mentioned the benefit of having a ‘smart classroom’: “I use more media. I will commend the university for this because I’ve been here a while. AV. Just simple AV. Being able to have a projector that works DVD, VHS, having all of the smart classrooms and we are still we have a long way to go. We need a lot more smart classrooms so that we can be able to incorporate the technology and in my case the media that I want and when I was first got here those rooms were few and far between and now we are seeing many more classrooms equipped with just simple AV that’s helping teach.”

**GQ: How has the hiring of new faculty changed faculty experiences?**

Intro Over 50% of SF State faculty have been hired since 2000. We know that in some departments and colleges this has resulted in a change in the balance among assistant, associate, full professors and lecturers.

Have you observed such a change in your department? If so, has the change in the balance of assistant, associate, full professor, and lecturers affected your work?

Heads nodded in agreement when asked if they have observed a change in their department due to the hiring of over 50% of faculty since 2000. They have all experienced less and less senior faculty and more and more junior faculty. They also mentioned that lecturers are all gone.

Has this change affected your research? Has this change affected your teaching?

The group was then asked if this change affected their research and/or teaching. A faculty member that is going up for tenure soon said it did not change for her. However, she did mention if she were joining her department today it might have been different: “I think if you see fewer and fewer senior faculty around I think that could affect one’s research and definitely the service. If they’re not there to do it the junior faculty has to step up. I’ve seen people walk away from their job in the few years that I’ve been here it’s very difficult for junior faculty especially those with families. They’ll come here stay for a year and they can’t cut it so they’ll go elsewhere so I’ve seen a bit of turnover in that respect. Has that affected me? No. It’s my concern for people coming in that we hire they may not have those opportunities here.”

Another person said that it has changed. When she first came here she was told it would be half teaching and half research, and that has changed. She went on to say: “If you came in within this period you were hired under certain conditions where there were trying to move towards a research culture here there’s lots of signals they like this research culture to come here. Then there’s the reality. The library, the lack of funding, the doubling up your class sizes that really work against that.” She continued by saying the benefit of losing the senior faculty are the grudging looks when you receive a grant: “Why aren’t these departments more excited when you get this type of funding? It’s [that] these older faculty are used to a different mold. It’s actually good to retire that perspective and allow a new culture to start building itself, but we’re in this kind of between phase. It’s getting tougher. It’s harder to justify and now that you’re getting to this point where you’re going up, now you have these extra duties - they may absorb your extra time.”
Has this balance affected teaching and what you teach?

The group agreed unanimously that the balance between teaching and research has been affected due to the lack of lecturers.

Has this change affected your participation in service (shared governance) to the university?

The participants complained that research has taken a backseat in some cases because of the budget cuts. Consequently, professors who were hired to teach capstone classes now have to teach more sections and intro classes. “Because we don’t have senior faculty to pick up this extra need, the junior people end up doing a lot of preps which basically eats up their time. So for some people this shift resulted in more service, for others more change in teaching.”

Another participant said: “I had support from the Dean about research but I didn’t find a context for research in my department. Actually, my research now I have to heath from the others. It’s really hard to keep my private space I find myself making justifications about the need of research that’s collective with teaching. I do not repeat the same class; research is feeding my new classes. Honestly, I don’t know how many times…I feel like a teaching machine without any research.”

What, if any, effects has this change had on relationships within your department, college, across colleges?

Some participants see these changes on relationships within their departments as a positive. It is an improvement. One faculty member stated, “We are such a minority, they are more professional- the junior faculty are not afraid anymore to say something so I think it was very beneficial to the culture of my department.” Others said they did not experience a change, but for the most part colleagues got along. One participant noted: “the junior faculty feel very comfortable speaking at faculty meetings. I just think it’s a great culture with having this surge.”

GQ: Changing attitudes toward teaching, professional achievement, service?
What are the current expectations and perceptions of faculty in terms of prioritizing teaching vs. research and creative activities vs. service? – in your department? – college? – the university?

The participants were asked about the current expectations and perceptions of faculty in terms of prioritizing teaching vs. research vs. service. Two participants felt expectations were clear and one participant felt he was hired to do research, has no time for research, and his departmental expectations are not clear. The participant who felt most confident about departmental expectations said, “My department has been excellent about mentoring and guiding the process and our internal RTP has been really really good year by year. Being consistently reviewed along the way has been a huge help in understanding how to balance those 3 areas.” (Referring to teaching, research, and service) She went on to say: “We have criteria clearly published criteria and anytime I have had a question about what is considered bad teaching - we have these scores. What do they mean if I receive a 2.4 out 5 what does that mean —it means it’s not meeting department expectations? The department has clear expectations and what those are, so I’ve been really fortunate to be in the department where this is all crystal clear.” The other participant agreed expectations were clear but there is no time to review. She also said she felt there was a good balance in her department.

The participant who felt his departmental expectations were unclear said, “I was hired for my research agenda. I don’t have time to develop my research. I took a leave of absence without salary in order to
finish my book. I feel expectations are not clear; everyone’s teaching (some agreement) I don’t have any problem with just teaching… what happens when you are trying to keep a balance?"

Another participant said she was given a document outlining departmental expectations but it wasn’t completely clear. There were still questions not answered such as “Do you publish once in 5 years or 5 times in one year?”

**At the university level, are you finding clarity and a balance?**

The participants who responded agreed there is clarity and balance at the university level. One participant’s comment referred to the university’s periodic review. The group concurred that having a periodic review was a benefit to them and helped them keep organized. A participant said: “I think it’s good that the university enforces these periodic reviews because you keep up with your stuff because my friends from other schools may or may not have a 3rd year review and then when they go up for tenure promotion they could spend a month to put stuff together. So I like the fact that the university forces us to do it every year or every year it at least keeps us organized when the time comes because it’s so much stuff at least I will be organized.”

Another participant spoke of the transparency in her department and how it is helpful in putting her file together: “We have so much transparency in our department I was able to look at 5 other files of faculty members in my department. Looking at their files and that was such a huge help and of course at the university level we have the meetings, they’re really helpful and at the last one I was at which was right before I submitted my file they had samples from different colleges and that was a real eye opener.” The last group member to respond commented on the process of receiving tenure. She felt the decision should be held more at a local level than at a university level, “I really feel like the ownership, the responsibility, the mentorship, everything is at the local level because those are the people that work with you every day, those are the people that know you, those are the people that should really have the greatest amount of responsibility to decide if you deserve tenure.”

**What is your understanding of the university’s mission, goals, and values?**

When asked about their understanding of the university’s mission, goals, and values, the immediate response was social justice. The common themes amongst participants in regards to this topic was SF State’s reputation and presence in the community, the unique students who attend SF State, and being able to impact the students. In regards to the university’s reputation in the community, a participant said: “I collaborate a lot with public health and UCSF. I know how they see us. I know why they are calling me because of what San Francisco State University represents. I do think we have a very strong presence about work in the community...we are the community by a lot of folks and that reputation precedes us.” Another participant commented: “I’m here because we’re not an R-1, because teaching matters and teaching is more highly valued at this institution than research, the mission of social justice is very, very important. I like that I cannot be promoted or granted tenure unless I’m a good teacher. I came here to teach.”

A faculty member also said: “My students in general came from a low social level so the opportunity to show one another or to show through teaching and research to have their own research and the possibility to open up to move to another level of class and life. Be part of this decision to show someone that didn’t represent something more…another possibility beyond belonging to class I was really, really proud.” The students were mentioned throughout the conversation. One participant stated that teaching “gives [her] a chance to have an impact on somebody’s life. Here, the students appreciate the opportunity they were given to get an education. I have had very many students who come after class to thank me for my class or they come to office hours and ask about a personal business that they are trying to start and they are
asking me advice and then they are super grateful. I give them advice within the class content. So I like San Francisco State, its more demanding, the relationship with your students is more personal, but I like this diversity and social justice and it fits with my personal values. So I think it makes me feel very comfortable.” Continuing on this topic, another participant said: “[The students] are very appreciative of why they are here. I feel like they know they’ve had to sacrifice certain things to be here and as a result they feel really responsible and for the most part really interested. And I really think you can have a large impact by giving them that little bit extra support they haven’t had.”

One participant added that there are many things chipping away at the mission of SF State suggested we find a way to sustain that mission even during a time of crisis.

**GQ: What are the economic trends that have shaped the University?**

**Is teaching effectiveness more challenged as student class size increases?**

The group was asked if their teaching effectiveness is more challenged as student class size increases. The group didn’t find the increase in class size to be a problem as much as the lack of lecturers and graduate TAs/RAs. The group averred that the budget cuts not only decreased faculty income but impaired their professional development. Each participant had a different personal experience as to how these factors have affected him or her. The first participant felt the impact of a decrease in graduate TAs, “class sizes may or may not be getting bigger in biology but the graduate student teaching support is going away and that changes how you test individuals because the professors have less time to grade, we just can’t tailor to learning preferences.”

The next two participants felt their teaching was not as effective because they were not being utilized by the university to teach the upper division classes they were hired for. One said: “I tried to rebuild the master and upper division level of the Spanish program, but after the crisis we don’t have any lecturers so we are teaching Spanish 101 or 102. It’s a waste of time, not only for me - I teach Spanish 101, I don’t have a problem with this but it’s a waste of time for the university because it’s the type of class a T.A. can teach. So, in some way my...our teaching has been really affected by that.” The other added: “I’m also teaching ESL 310, I took the job away from a lecturer. I’m doing the best I can but because I have so many other responsibilities I probably could spend a few more hours with the students. That’s what I would be doing as a lecturer, but I can’t. I mean we all know the university has to make tough decisions, but even some acknowledgement that there’s a sacrifice - this is denting into the impact we have as researchers.” There was agreement amongst faculty members on this topic.

The other two participants had a similar experience of receiving acknowledgment/awards for papers they submitted to various conferences but did not have the money to attend the conference. This ultimately is interfering with their professional development. One of these participants stated: “In addition to the teaching, a very big problem that must be documented in this process is the impact on professional development that the budget cuts are having. When there’s no money to travel when our paper gets accepted to a conference in Singapore and there’s no money to attend this conference and there used to be better resources at the university level. So you have to financially support the professional development and growth...so yes it’s a huge impact on teaching but I think long term it’s going to affect people’s ability to get on tenure.”

The other faculty member told her story: “I had a paper that was selected for the best paper of the international business academy and I couldn’t fly and didn’t get the award because the condition was you have to be there to get the award, you can’t just get it if you don’t show up to present your paper. So I had to remove my name. It was in the summer, the ticket is my monthly salary so I decided okay I’m not going but it was so embarrassing professionally I would never ever dare
submit paper again. I had to write the conference chair and apologize that I can’t fly and I had to withdraw from program because the program was already printed and published.”

What about furloughs?

When asked about furloughs there was a general agreement that furloughs have not changed a thing, in fact they have made things worse. They are still required the same research and the students are still required to know all the material. As a result, faculty is still working on furlough days. Only one participant admitted to not working on her furloughs. Thoughts shared by the participant include: “It’s made life worse actually, on the days that you have to cancel but, I’ve never used a furlough day on my own because it just isn’t fair to the students. It’s more a burden on you and then you are squeezing everything in to fewer class hours.” And: “my problem is that my colleagues, we are being judged on the same bar so I can’t say ‘hey sir, I’m furloughed can I give you 10 percent less publications or 10 percent less research productivity and can you still give me that grant?’”

What about a faculty club?

The group was asked if they would like to see a faculty club. There seemed to be little interest amongst the group. They basically all felt the same way, they’d like to see a faculty club, but they don’t know that they would actually use a faculty club.

Q: What is an especially memorable or exciting teaching experience you have had at SF State?

The last question asked each faculty member to share a memorable or exciting teaching experience they have had at SF State. Below are their stories:

“I had one senior faculty observe my class so I was well prepared, she sent me the criteria. The class started, I put up my slides and the projector died. Some students tried to fix it - no help. I tried calling - no help. So I said okay, I continued the class and now I’m not prepared, of course I didn’t have printouts of the slides students couldn’t take notes on my slides. It was a complete disaster so I shifted towards mostly asking questions and I was hoping the students were prepared. I turned it into a discussion more than teaching. The students felt so sorry for me that the projector failed when I had a visitor, they participated every student, students who never spoke in class when I asked a question everybody. The teacher wrote: ‘it’s so impressive how every student participated.’ I have never seen that - the students are speaking so actively in class. I’m like, ‘yes, they don’t normally speak so actively in class.’”

“I think the coolest thing about teaching…I think teaching is a privilege, and teaching at a university is a privilege - that there’s always that feeling when you come back from spring break but you get in the classroom and they create the energy for you. I love it. I love that feeling, I get high off the feeling. But yesterday I was conferencing with a sophomore who’s really struggling in my class she would be called ‘generation 1.5.’ She left high school, has been here for about 20 years but has never developed good writing skills, but she’s conferencing with me about this paper she has to write about some theme of authority. We’ve written all the Milgrims Study, the Ash Study, you have to write about some theme some personal topic and she clearly didn’t know what to say. She had a pretty hollow draft and she couldn’t answer any of the questions I had asked her about the readings so I set the draft aside. I said ‘you know what? Let’s just think about a personal experience. Have you ever had a major decision to make in your life where you felt like people didn’t agree with you?’ And she said, ‘yea, well I had to decide last year whether I should continue living with my parents, or whether I should move in with my boyfriend.’”
said, ‘so what happened?’ She said, ‘Well it’s a year later and I’m still living with my parents.’ I said, ‘wow! So what was that like?’ And she said a few more sentences then her face just got completely convoluted and she started crying and the rest of the 40 minutes the writing conference was emotionally very tense for me because she was talking about things. She clearly thought she was in a verbally abusive family life but she had 15 points that directly related to the story and even though she was conflicted telling me this story, she was taking notes and so it was a complete shift in how writing this assignment was really speaking to her. Where before, when she walked in she really couldn’t care less. She just wanted me to, she just wanted to show up for the assignment. She left, she was still very upset but I walk away and I feel like I’m really ill prepared to deal with these students, but they’re an extremely resilient population here and its students like that - nontraditional to the core but deserve to be here. And I think that it’s their personal stories, you really have to be trained on multiple levels, but more just be prepared on multiple levels how you can connect with them and I think it will surprise you.”

“I had this student both last semester and this semester. Horrendous writer, last semester she handed in her first lab report and it was pretty bad. We worked a lot last semester on how to improve connecting ideas, on how you have to actually look at the word. Does it make sense from sentence to sentence? Are you actually saying anything? And we worked really hard and I just graded her second midterm and she got a perfect score on all the short answer questions. And it’s a weird, it’s not really a teachable moment but I jumped up for joy. Again, I looked at the name and I thought, here’s someone that can now articulate in a succinct way for 6 different questions, so she hit every point. I had a leap of joy.”

“One of the classes I teach has a lot to do with media literacy - why should we care about the news, why is the news relevant to our lives. I’m talking to a generation that is tuned out so trying to explain to them that we have to be active consumers of the news, that they need to go beyond the comedy shows for our source of information and I say to them that the ultimate motivation for watching the news and not just paying attention to what’s going on in our local communities, but at the state, national, and international level is so that we can get laid. So when we meet people at cocktail parties we can impress them with information that we received. So the other day I went to a fundraiser put together by college students in broadcasting in our department and I was talking to one of the students and he said, ‘you know I took your class two semesters ago and you know, it’s true. I met this woman from Columbia and I had actually watched this thing on PBS that Jim Laird did on his show, On the News Hour, on Colombia. And I started talking to her about the Columbian economy and she was so impressed that we are dating now. It’s true what you said about the news being important to our lives, and I got laid professor.’ And it was a teaching moment.”