Suggested Practices to Address the Affective Learning Domain in the College Classroom

1. **Create a warm and positive classroom environment.** Who enjoys being in a space that is hostile and uncomfortable? Everyone, no matter age or ability, has the basic desire to feel safe and included. By establishing a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom, students will be better equipped to take in the cognitive demands of your course’s content. In fact, creating a pleasant learning environment will be much more conducive to rigor and high standards, as you will be implicitly giving students permission to explore, work through challenges, and learn in deeper ways.

Think about a learning space you’ve been in that you’ve enjoyed. By no means, does this space need to be a classroom. It could be a guitar workshop you recently attended through the local music club; a sailboat demonstration at a nearby marina; a ski class you so bravely joined on the family trip to Tahoe; a bible study at your church; or a yoga class you’ve joined in order to help relieve the stress of teaching! What is it about the experience that helped you learn? If you enjoyed the experience, there’s a good chance that the occasion, by and large, was enjoyable and even fun.

Some possible practices to cultivate warmth in the classroom:

- Learn every student's name the first week of class and address them regularly.
- Share some of your outside-of-the-classroom life with your students, particularly parts of your experiences that are relevant to the course and/or experiences that reflect some similar challenges of your students. For instance, be explicit with your students how you manage your time and/or what you do when you feel overwhelmed with all the tasks in front of you (in and out of work).
- Be authentically interested in and concerned about students.
- Expect high standards in your course while practicing a pedagogy informed by current research and careful choices brought into
your practice. See all other parts of this website (www.thepurposefulprof.org).

- Recognize and honor that students are most likely doing the best they can at any given moment.
- Love your students, genuinely.

2. **Build discipline-specific study skills and habits of mind into regular classroom activities.** While it’s great to have a “lesson” in the beginning of the semester about studying in the discipline, students will be more likely to incorporate suggestions if this kind of instruction is addressed on a regular basis. For instance, in many of the natural science courses, like almost all courses, understanding vocabulary is essential to grasping course material. Schedule class time to show students various strategies to learn vocab in a discipline. (See various vocabulary strategies throughout www.thepurposefulprof.org)

   In addition to or in place of study skills, bring up a topic on a regular basis during class, such as “Tuesday’s Trouble,” and be specific about a problem students are experiencing. (You can discover what’s going on with students through various check-ins and short reflective pieces; see Affective Check-ins, Exit Slips, and/or One Minute Papers. For instance, you might say something like, “Are any of you having trouble finding enough time in your day to do the homework/read the assigned chapters for this class?” Let students express their troubles, either in small groups or whole class, and then move into possible ways of thinking about time and how to manage and rearrange schedules. See possible time management strategies throughout this website.

3. **Institute reflective responses throughout the semester and, perhaps, each unit.** Along with facilitating metacognition in your courses, allow students to reflect on some of their non-cognitive experiences as well. This can, and probably should, be done in writing, periodically at the end of class or on a class electronic discussion. Similarly, students can write either privately to you, to a small group, or to the whole class. You can ask students open-ended questions, “We are in week 5 of the semester, how are things going for you? Tell me what is working well for you? Where are you struggling? What factors outside of school are affecting your academics?” You can also see Shamblin’s list of Affective Prompts. You can follow this up with a “Peer Power” exercise.

4. **Practice “Peer Power.”** Find every opportunity to empower students. Indeed, students take direction much more readily from a peer than from the professor or some other authority figure.
• After a quiz or exam, arrange students in groups, placing one student who did well on the assessment in each group. (You’ll want to talk to these students ahead of time for their approval.) Ask the peer to explain what he/she/they did to prepare for the exam, and ask for specific details explaining the study strategies. Afterwards, collect all the strategies on an overhead or on the board so students can see what works well.

• As part of an Affective Check-in, ask students what can be done to address any problems or concerns that people have. For instance, early on in the semester, if some students don’t yet have a textbook, ask others what can be done to solve this problem; likewise, later on in the semester, when students are overwhelmed or have fallen behind, ask what others have done to work through these problems.

5. **Build on Students’ Strengths.** Consider the ways in which you think about your students. After a thorough self-reflection and analysis, you may find you think in terms of what students can’t do rather than what they can, even though you have the most sincere intentions in mind. In many ways, our larger society is often focused on deficits rather than strengths, and our genuine urge to thwart this mindset in ourselves is very difficult to shed.

Chances are that if you’re thinking in terms of students’ deficits, then you’re probably using a language that reflects that thought process. In order to move away from a deficits model, ask yourself the following questions and consider building your instruction around students’ strengths. You can hear some faculty discuss their application of strengths-based models in the various videos below.