BEST PRACTICES: SBS Soft/Life Skills (Definitions & Instructional Activities)

Life skills/soft skills are those social and professional behaviors that frequently define the margin between success and failure. They include professional behaviors (presenting oneself professionally), information management skills (thinking through, planning, and carrying out complex tasks), interpersonal skills (working collaboratively and communicating clearly with others), and intrapersonal skills (regularly evaluating one’s progress and performance).

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The department encourages that instructors will thoroughly infuse Soft/Life skills development from each of the above areas into their instructional activities. Following are a few ways to do that.

PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIORS

- Build an understanding of syllabus statements as policy and the syllabus as a contract.
- Early in the semester, emphasize the number of hours needed to do well in the course.
- Provide reminders in each class of assignments, tests and provide study tips.
- Email or speak to students in person when they are at or near their maximum allowed absences for the course.
- Discuss the impact of social media on employment, and encourage students to “clean up” their Facebook page.
- Provide class presentations on building self-reliance.
- Arrange for a classroom presentation on Soft/Life Skills.
- Send students a "Thought for the Week" which targets Soft/Life Skills.
- Encourage students to post drafts of their papers (in advance) to receive feedback on their research, critical thinking, presentation of opposing views and conclusions.
- Encourage responsibility by assigning homework and activities with clearly posted and consistently enforced due dates.
- Promote engagement by making course content relevant, by relating content to students’ lives, and by giving personal or anecdotal narratives that both engage and encourage students.
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SKILLS

- Schedule a visit to the library, or have a librarian visit the class.
- Give students blog posts that used statistics to make claims. The goal is to make students aware that when they encounter statistical data outside of the classroom they should critically evaluate it and not just accept it as factual.
- Teach students to be consumers of research papers. Guide them to develop ability to distinguish scientific research papers from those of mass media.
- Provide in class activities applying theories learned in class to explain current issues and suggest solutions to current problems.
- Encourage students to be skeptics. Promote the use of critical thinking and related research-based literature to evaluate and communicate the reliability and validity of claims.
- Include critical thinking and creative problem solving in just about each class meeting by giving each student a chance to respond to a situation, question, or issue raised in class. This forces students to begin deepening their level of understanding, and encourages them to begin thinking on their feet in new and creative ways.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- Be timely and responsive to student queries and emails.
- Learn students’ names and call on them by name.
- Encourage students to learn each other’s names.
- Give an opportunity for learning a little about the students. This may encourage them to want to do well, because they perceive you know them and care about them.
- Use in class or online discussions as a time for community building.
- Encourage students to work with each other by note sharing, study groups, etc.
- Include a peer review exercise, where students provide constructive criticism of each other’s writing and research. Students may also work in groups where they share ideas and collectively analyze assigned readings.
- Assign students to work in 4-person teams. The teams must evaluate pros and cons of a controversial issue, considering individuals’ differing points of view. These team activities encourage leadership, participation in group processes, critical thinking, tolerance and value of diversity, and communication skills.
- Divide students into teams and compete for extra bonus points at the end of the semester. The instructor gets an opportunity to listen to each team discussing the material, and this activity provides feedback to the instructor as to whether or not students understand the material.
- Form student groups for analyzing an assigned reading.
- Have student groups summarize assigned portions of a chapter, and teach the class on their particular section.
- Provide collaborative learning experiences for the clarification of course concepts amongst peer groups in class.
- Seek feedback from students about the course, and model a positive reception and use of the feedback received.
INTRAPERSONAL SKILLS

- On the first day of class, or in the online orientation, provide clear classroom expectations about the course, assignments, schedule and expected time investment. Provide an opportunity for student questions and requests for clarification at the second class meeting.
- Follow-up the syllabus review with a syllabus quiz or have students sign a written pledge stating they understand the syllabus.
- Use low stakes quizzes early in the course schedule to give students a chance to become more aware of their level of learning and understanding in the course.
- Provide students with detailed reports about their progress after exams, papers, presentations or projects.
- Encourage students to regularly monitor their attendance and grades in D2L.
- Have students calculate their grade at midterm, and then have them explain what behaviors contributed to that grade. Explain what adaptive behaviors they will adopt for the second half of the semester to improve their grades.
- Discuss study skills, benefits of having a growth mindset, and how to respond to failures.