**Turning Your Studio into an Honors Course Through Engagement**

Approaching your class as an honors course helps students learn accountability, shed the stigma of developmental/remedial courses, and increases their engagement with the college as a whole. Treat “studio” (CCR094) students as if they’re in an honors course by:

1. Engendering metacognitive skills/self-understanding
2. Nourishing interests through reading and discourse of scholarly topics
3. Connecting students with school resources and activities
4. Empowering students to challenge and support each other

**Activity:** You can do **any or all** for the next ten minutes, and you can work with others ☺

Brainstorm at least five ideas for a **scavenger hunt** that connects students with your school’s/community’s resources.

For example:

1. *What are the drop-in hours at Advising? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*
2. *Show proof of attending any campus activity in the past week for 10 points:*

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Free write: At what point did you feel you were “good” at being a student? Can you remember the transition or process? At what moment did you either finally feel like you had a copy of the instruction manual or finally realize there wasn’t one?

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Brainstorm **places on your campus** that you can physically take your students during studio for an activity related to writing or reading.

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Brainstorm several 5-15 minute beginning of class **writing prompts** that could facilitate positive self-reflection and/or tie into a specific skill:

Ex: *“Free write for a while about your best friend. Then, using as many concrete details and examples as possible, convince me that he/she is awesome! Show the evidence!”*

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Brainstorm about an **ideal club** you would start for studio students if you had all the time in the world. Why this club? What activities would it offer? Why?

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Great. Now can you tie any of these activities into HLC buzzwords such as “retention” or “completion” or “assessment” or “engagement” in order to possibly justify either a course release for creating it—and/or which faculty might you encourage to start such a club in order to improve their visibility or CV?

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1. **Tips for the initial “get-to-know-you” discussion:**

Set the tone early that the class is fun and that you enjoy teaching it because it’s a privilege to engage closely with students. In the initial meeting, after the 121 class has left, you can:

a. Sit among students.

b. Create get-to-know-you questions focused on accomplishments, interests, skills, and goals.

c. Share your own educational path. Focus on where you struggled and how you overcame. Share your genuine love of teaching and fondness for students.

d. Encourage students to ask each other follow-up questions from the very first moments of studio to engender autonomy, peer-relationships, and trust.

e. Praise where you can, encourage when needed.

f. Hang a copy of your school’s clubs list in your classroom. Be ready to hand out copies during the get-to-know-you session. Keep turning students’ attention toward it. “Oh! You love photography! Did you know we have a photography club? The advisor is…”

2. **Other** **first day considerations:**

Resist the urge to jump straight to grammar and/or going over the syllabus. Likely students aren’t going to remember much of what you teach this day—they’re going to be overwhelmed—but they will remember how they *felt* about the class.

1. Make sure to do something that feels immediately relevant to succeeding at the 121 content. Ex: If you had students work on writing a paragraph in MLA format in 121, give studio students a chance to troubleshoot/workshop each other’s. If the first 121 assignment is a diagnostic essay, perhaps give students a chance to free write on what they know well, what they want to change in the world, etc.
2. Your main goals are to alleviate anxiety, motivate an awareness of accountability, and foster the idea that an honors student is simply one who does honorable work. That’s an achievable goal!
3. Although grammar will likely be a component of this course, avoid the topic on day one. It’s a trigger word. You might even frame grammar as “sentence building” or “language proficiency” or anything that sounds less terrifying.
4. Dispel the perception that 121-only students are in any way superior. Explain that all students would benefit from studio and a chance to expand and broaden research, engage in discourse, and practice course concepts in depth.

Of course, you can’t do everything in one day, but try to layer the **first-day(s) activities** with metacognitive benefits. Here are some ideas:

1. Write on specific areas of interest, skills, moments of success, etc. (“Write about something you’re really good at…” “Write about a time you made a successful argument” or “What do you want your life to be like in ten years?”)
2. Provide reading that validates their experiences and intellect (such as “What is Intelligence, Anyway?” by Asimov or “How to Write a Letter” by Keillor) followed by discussion or brief written response.
3. Brainstorm on what an “honors” class is and then discuss or write about how the students and teacher will live by those principles.
4. Discuss some “This I Believe” essays and then ask students to share out in small groups.
5. Create a reverse outline—in groups—of a successful first assignment/essay that specifically discusses something positive and/or relevant to their lives.

3. **Continuously foster interaction and agency:**

1. Facilitate assignments and projects that require students to explore the school/interact with campus events.
2. Move students around even during class! Take them to the library to pick out books or ask librarians research questions. Take them to support workshops when possible. Use an outside seating area/alternative classroom when possible. Is there a gallery they can visit or any presentation of student work?
3. Reward or require the acquisition of a public library card.
4. Plan time for simply sitting and talking with students in large group and asking metacognitive questions that honor their insights.
5. Host librarians, tutors, advisors, and representatives from TRIO or Catalyst programs in your classroom.
6. Continue to refer students to clubs and campus activities whenever applicable.
7. Encourage students to submit writing to the school’s literary magazine or blog.
8. Frame a writing project or scavenger hunt that requires students to interview a teacher, sit in on a club meeting, and/or check out campus resources and support services.
9. If your school offers a chapter of the English Honor Society or National Honor Society, encourage them often and early to join.
10. Forward article that articles that you come across that relate to their topics and/or interests. Do this after the semester ends, too, if you can!

**4. Once you have awoken students’ inner sleeper honors agents:**

Of course, now you want to continue the momentum throughout the course. In studio classes, because of the small numbers, it’s easy to get to know individual students’ interests well, so keep turning them toward resources, campus activities and clubs, and books that might engage them.

1. Keep sitting among students to reduce power imbalances. Change your seat often so all feel included and there’s no “head” of the table.
2. Let students lead and demonstrate agency as often as possible.
3. Require that students help each other flesh out ideas and work through difficulties with their topics. On a regular basis, at the beginning of class, I sit with the students, ask at least two to share thesis ideas, maps, ideas for opposition research, etc. Then they help each other troubleshoot.
4. Structure some 121 activities to rely on the expertise of studio students (Ex: the studio class read an interesting article on Thursday, or for homework, that will place him/her as an authority during Thursday’s 121 discussion.)
5. Think carefully about writing prompts or contextualized grammar exercises that engender confidence. Don’t miss an opportunity. Even turning students toward a website such a “freerice.com” during free moments is a way to turn practicing grammar into social action, thus empowering students that they are honorable.
6. Although you want to greatly encourage group cohesion in studio classes, make sure they interact with the mainstream 121 students in group work, also.