

Walking The Path: Lesson Four

Preparing for College Classes

A bit of advice given to a young Native American at the time of his initiation: as you go the way of life, you will see a great chasm. Jump. It is not as wide as you think.

Joseph Campbell
1904-1987

Guiding Question:

How should I prepare for my journey?

Lesson Goal

Students will understand that to be prepared for their journey to college they will need to learn good study skills and to use the support of others along the way.

Summary of Lesson

Students will brainstorm the differences and similarities between high school and college classes. They will analyze a college syllabus and plan a monthly study schedule for a student in that course. A guest from the college will introduce subject-specific college examples and will overview the courses and support services available for students at the college.

Skills Emphasized

- Compare and contrast
- Time management

Materials needed:

- Venn diagram
- College syllabus example (Astronomy 101 included or sample from college partner)
- Monthly calendars
- Invited guest from college

Background for the teacher

The first activity in this lesson asks students to compare the differences between college and high school classes. This excerpt from “The Challenge of College Readiness” by David Conley discusses common differences and appeared in *Educational Leadership* in April 2007.

“Research suggests that one of the major reasons that students falter in college is the gap between their high school experiences and college expectations. Many first-year students find that their college courses are fundamentally different from their high school courses (Conley, Aspengren, Stout, & Veach, 2006). College instructors expect students to draw inferences, interpret results, analyze conflicting source documents, support arguments with evidence, solve complex problems that have no obvious answer, draw conclusions, offer explanations, conduct research, and generally think

deeply about what they are being taught (National Research Council, 2002). College courses also move at a faster pace, often requiring students to read eight or nine books in the same amount of time it took them to read only one in high school (Standards for Success, 2003).

According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (2006), the vast majority of first-year college students are expected to work with others in and out of class on complex problems and projects. They are expected to make presentations and explain what they have learned. College courses require students to be independent, self-reliant learners who recognize when they are having problems and know how to seek help from professors, fellow students, or other sources. In these classes, students are expected to write multiple three- to five-page papers that must be well reasoned, well organized, and well documented with evidence from credible sources.”

Lesson Design

Begin the lesson by asking students what they think the similarities and differences are between high school and college classes. Have them fill out the downloadable Venn diagram handout associated with this lesson, noting things they think are the same and different.

Next, have small groups of students compare their diagrams. Ask for a report out on common understandings from the groups. Then, pass out the sample syllabus from the astronomy 101 class or the sample from your college partner. Have groups analyze the syllabus to see if they were right about the similarities/differences noted in their diagrams. Go through the syllabus with the class noting important items such as class times, teaching assistants, prerequisites, grading practices, class assignments, etc. Be sure to point out specific examples of high school work the students are doing now that will prepare them for the work in a college class, and skills they may need to improve to be successful with college work.

Follow up by inviting guests from various campus resources (writing center, math lab, advisors, professors, etc. to the class to perform subject specific in-class exercises.

Math Lab Lesson example:

1. Someone from the college’s Math Lab visits the class and provides an overview of their math classes and support services available.
2. Give each student a note card with a math problem to solve.

As students complete the problems, or struggle to find the answers, the teacher (Math Lab instructor/tutor) will walk around the room with 3x5 note cards with two response types:

If the answer is correct -

- 1) Congratulations! You have correctly solved this problem from (insert name of local college and correlating math class). Here is another one for you to try.

Give students another problem from the next course.

If the student is struggling with their problem -

2) It looks like you could use a bit of help with this one. Who's in your network to help?

At this time, the instructor might also provide some hints about how to solve that specific problem.

3. Eventually, all of the students should encounter a problem that they are having difficulty completing and the lesson closes with a summary of services.

Show students an outline of the Math Courses available at their local college and explain where each problem they solved fits into a current college curriculum. This exercise demonstrates how much progress in mathematics is needed for each individual student in order to fulfill the general transfer degree requirements. This exercise also reveals to students that they are already capable of successfully completing certain problems that many first year (freshman) students are studying.

Teacher note: sample college assignments in math, English, and other subjects are available online in the report “Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts” at www.achieve.org.

Lesson Closure

Finally, based on the college syllabus, and using printouts of the blank calendar template on the CNE web site schools resources page, have students complete monthly planning calendars. Fill in due dates, study group times, etc. Have them decide how they would schedule their time to be successful in the class.

Ask students to complete their journal entry for today's lesson.

Day Four

I know that the path we're taking on our journey will not always be easy. I expect we will encounter some rough terrain. But today we learned that if we're prepared, we'll be successful in our journey.

Things I'm doing now to prepare...

The hardest part of my journey will be...

I'll need to...