

A Prescription for the Chiropractic Student

Students are lamps to be lit, not vessels to be filled.

There is more to being a student than gaining admission to a chiropractic college, registering for courses, or attending classes. Four years of such behavior is no guarantee that you have been educated. A more accurate statement of what has happened is that you have been exposed to the educational process, not that you have actually gotten an education. Becoming educated is a dynamic process, not a static one. To repeat the opening quotation: "Students are lamps to be lit, not vessels to be filled." It raises the question, "How should the mind of the chiropractic student best be ignited?" Good teachers are only a part of the answer. More appropriately, education should be viewed as a form of synthesis, a concertizing of energy on the part of both teacher and student, a kind of academic homeostasis.

Most students have only the vaguest notion of what their role in the educational process should be. If a poll were taken on any campus to discover why students think "studenting" is all about, I strongly suspect that their concept would include: doing assignments, paying attention in class and passing examinations. Beyond these fundamentals, few insights exist.

As a communicologist, my bias prompts me to see education in terms of the conventional communication model: sender; message; channel; receiver; effect. Beyond these elements, there is also the notion that effective communication should be circular, not linear. This means that information should not be exchanged between student and professor like a ping pong match. Messages occur simultaneously in a classroom; while the professor is sending messages from the front of the classroom, students (whether they realize it or not) are sending messages to the professor. Naturally, a great many of these messages are nonverbal: that is, body language. Classrooms are virtually hotbeds of liminal and subliminal, overt and covert communication. Indeed, there is more to education than sitting in a classroom waiting to be educated -- like lying on the beach waiting for a suntan.

Students must come to the class with an attitude and philosophy of learning. There must be a willingness, an openness, and a readiness to learn. On any first day of class, professors look for signs, indicators of a student's inner state. Since none of us are mindreaders, we must seek other ways of discovering what is going on in the other person's head. You may not realize how much you advertise about yourself simply by the way you sit, stand, walk, dress, and even smell. While the catechism of academic protocol frowns upon such practices as making inferences, assumptions, and presumptions without a sound basis, we all make them. For instance, the first five minutes in class with a new professor generates a great many impressions. Depending on how evaluative or judgmental a student you are, plus having certain congenital instincts with which some of us are endowed, you do arrive at some kind of opinion about the professor. The professor likewise acquires a first impression of you. Although you may not place much importance on first impressions, they do provide a springboard for future attitudes, values, and beliefs.

Whatever the means, a student must communicate with the professor. Both student and professor come to class with a variety of conceptions and misconceptions about the subject being taught and with various personalities. As a result of this commingling of ideas and perceptions, students often

learn things incidentally; i.e., things having no direct bearing on the subject being taught. This phenomenon is not however one-sided. Students frequently teach their professor. In consequence, the process is both simultaneous and circular, interactive and dynamic. Student and professor learn from one another. Unless students see themselves as an integral part of this process, not passive lumps seated in chairs, the learning experience is doomed to failure.

Here are some suggestions you might want to experiment with next semester. Be advised however they are not magic formulae. Studenting is an art, not a science and, as such, requires time, patience, and practice.

1. On the first day of class, observe which aspect of the classroom the professor physically favors; sit in the professor's direct line of sight.
2. Don't preface any of your remarks to the professor with the phrase, "I know this is a stupid question, but ..."
3. Notice to which color the professor is partial and hand in your term paper with a cover of that color.
4. Sit next to a bright student, one who participates a great deal.
5. Go to the library and read anything written by your professor.
6. Address your professors by their proper title: Dr., Prof., Mr., Ms. or Mrs.
7. If you are late coming to class, and another student is making a presentation, wait outside until the student is finished before entering.
8. Submit all assignments on time and, if you anticipate handing in a late paper, ask for an extension beforehand.
9. While speaking or listening to a professor, maintain good eye contact.
10. Professors love neatness. Don't disappoint them.
11. Sit up in your seat and face the professor squarely. If necessary, turn your chair slightly in the teacher's direction. Teachers equate slumping in a seat as disinterest.
12. When responding to something a teacher has just asked, incorporate the gist of what was asked in your answer. For example, if the teacher asks: "Why is it important to understand proprioceptive activity in dealing with coordinative problems in the world of sports?" Your answer should begin like this: "An understanding of proprioceptive activity is vital to coordination because ..." This will tell your professor that you heard and understood the question.

Studenting is an art. There is considerably more to it than registering for courses and going to classes. You must communicate effectively with and your professors. I hope some of the ideas I have put forth will assist you in earning better grades next semester.

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Editor's Note: As a professor of communication, Dr. Eisenberg is frequently asked to speak at conventions and regional meetings. For further information regarding speaking engagements, you may call (914) 271-4441, or write to Two Wells Avenue, Croton-on-Hudson, New York, 10520.

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