# Student-Centered Teaching: Belonging, Transparency, and a Growth Mindset as avenues to greater Equity and Inclusion in the Classroom

The UToledo Teaching Center
New Faculty Orientation
August 2021

# Equity and Inclusivity

Equity is the provision of personalized resources needed for all individuals to reach common goals. In other words, the goals and expectations are the same for all students, but the supports needed to achieve those goals depends on the students' needs (Equity Education, 2019).

https://eqeducation.org/

Inclusive teaching refers to a variety of teaching approaches that strive to address the needs of all students. Inclusive teaching provides a learning experience that allows students from all backgrounds, learning styles and abilities to be successful. Inclusivity in the classroom implies that the classroom environment is one in which all students feel that their contributions and perspectives are equally valued and respected (Cal Poly).

https://teach.ufl.edu/resource-library/inclusivity-in-the-classroom/

# Three Concepts that Promote Equity and Inclusion in the Classroom

1. Belonging & Sense of Community

2. Transparency

3. Growth Mindset

Student-Centered teaching cultivates classroom communities by emphasizing student needs, equity, and engagement

# #1 – CREATE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND BELONGING IN YOUR CLASS

# SEND A WELCOME LETTER

**Prior to the 1ˢᵗ day of class**

**5 Key Elements of a Welcome Email:**

1. **Express your excitement** to begin working with your students in the class

2. **Share some personal information** about yourself

3. **Acknowledge any current circumstances** (i.e., the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and the ongoing struggle for racial justice) and the challenges facing many students right now

4. Emphasize the ways in which **you are working to design a course experience that will be high quality and engaging, but also flexible**, given the complicated and changing nature of the world we live in

5. Provide some **basic information about your course modality and expectations for engagement on the first day**

   – e.g., "Log in to Blackboard Collaborate Ultra at 9:30 on Tuesday for our first virtual class together";

   – "I'll see you all in UH 2250 on Tuesday at 9:30 for our first class

# SEND A WELCOME LETTER

Bonus points!

- **Ask students to respond to the email answering 1-2 questions about themselves** (Important: You must respond to each response you receive, and in a timely manner. Otherwise, this strategy can backfire.)

OR

- Create a **"Getting to Know Each Other" discussion board in Blackboard,** post a few questions there, and ask students to introduce themselves and respond to each other (and you respond to the posts too).

  - You can give students early access to your Blackboard page by following the instructions here: Scroll down to "Set course availability" and use the "Select Dates" option under "Set Course Duration". https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Courses/Course_Customization/Course_Properties

# CONTINUOUSLY REASSURE ALL STUDENTS THAT THEY BELONG

Students may be questioning their ability to succeed in your class or even in college.

Consider, throughout the semester:

- Expressing your belief in a growth mindset: that with time and persistence everyone can learn and succeed

- Sharing stories of times when you faced a challenge or even failed, how you persevered, and that things get better over time

- Using examples or exercises that illustrate how assumptions we make about learning, talent, or intelligence may be flawed, and instead discuss learning as a process

- Simply reminding students that if they are here, then they deserve to be here. They matter and they are valued.

# OTHER TOOLS TO PROMOTE SENSE OF BELONGING

**Learn and use students names and have students learn each others' names**

In discussion posts, ask students to reply to each other and to use each other's names

Ask students to post a photo (or representative image) to their BB profile

**If possible, hold brief meetings with each student at least once a semester**

Have a purpose for the meeting – e.g., to provide verbal feedback to a first writing assignment; then use a few minutes to ask the student how the term is going (ask specific questions that can't be answered by "yes" or "no", e.g., what is your favorite class this term? why? Or what do you like to do to relax?

**Keep a document with each student's name, what they shared from their welcome letter responses, and anything else of note that you learn about them during the semester.**

Refer to these notes before you meet with the student and periodically over the course of the semester

# OTHER TOOLS TO PROMOTE SENSE OF BELONGING

**Set clear expectations for student engagement with each other**

Use a Class Engagement Rubric that includes aspects such as collegiality, supportiveness and respect

**Build peer relationships**

Conduct discussions in stable small groups

Build forums for groups to review for exams together

**Make frequent, strategic, and highly visible appearances online**

Weekly front page messages to class – with announcements, tips for how to approach the next course section, words of encouragement, memes

Respond to a subset of discussion posts

# DISCUSSION FORUMS

- It starts with the right prompts and the right guidelines (Transparency!)
  - Require use of course material, with citation
    - *E.g., How does the information presented in the Stephanie Coontz reading help you understand the debate about family change vs. family decline that was discussed on p. 10 of Chapter 1? Specifically, to what extent does the information that Coontz presented support the family change perspective and/or the family decline perspective? Make sure to explain your answer using specific details from the text and reading (and remember to provide citations!).*
  - Require response to each other's posts, a set time after initial post (so students must return to the forum after they make their initial post)
- Set up small, stable groups (ideal size 6-10) that engage with each other in forums over entire semester
- And you must engage in the discussion
  - Respond to a "random" set of posts each forum – ask additional questions, nudge for more depth of response
  - Clarify any confusions, misconceptions
  - Give kudos for particularly good discussions
- Include as graded element of the course (even if only grading a "random" subset each week)
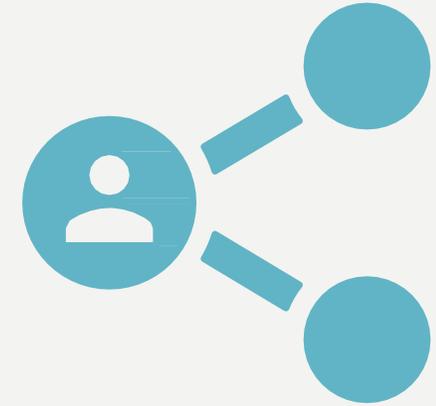
Asynchronous online discussions can be a powerful tool for engagement, learning, and community-building

# #2 – Transparency

Transparent teaching and learning methods explicitly focus on *how* and *why* students are learning course content in particular ways (Hutchings, 2016).

These methods benefit all students, but are particularly useful to those lacking familiarity with homework and study strategies that enable them to successfully master the material

https://canvas.northseattle.edu/courses/1734110/pages/overview-of-transparency-in-learning-and-teaching-tilt
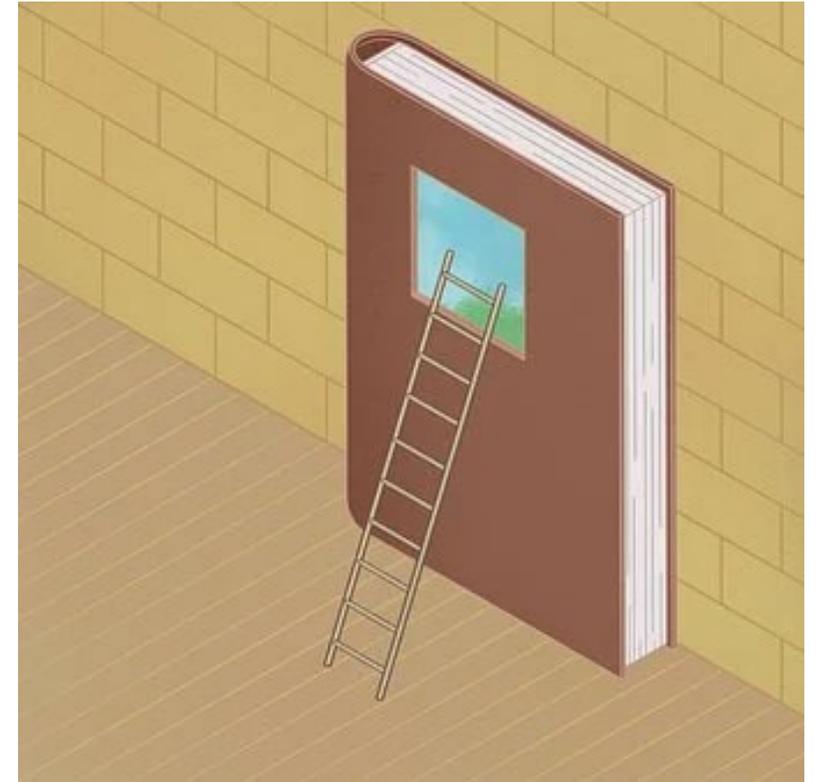
# THE BASICS OF TRANSPARENCY

**Purpose (Why?)**

- Skills practiced
- Knowledge gained

} relevance to students

connection to

Learning Outcomes

Winkelmes, 2017

**Task (What & How?)**

- What to do

- How to do it

**Criteria (How will you be evaluated?)**

- Provide checklist or rubric in advance to help students self-evaluate

- Provide examples of good work (annotated essay examples, sample exams)

# CREATE A ROUTINE, RELIABLE WEEKLY SCHEDULE

- E.g., Quizzes always due on Thursdays; initial Discussion Posts always due on Monday evenings

- Use a **course calendar** to keep you and your students on track

- And build due date reminders into the class – Mention in weekly emails, set up reminders in Black Board, give reminders during face to face sessions

- Remember, stress affects memory! At stressful times, students will need more reminders than usual about when things are due, what was previously covered in class, etc.

# SAMPLE COURSE CALENDAR

| When | Where | What | Why | How | Due: |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Monday, Aug 17, 4:20-5:35** | Group 1: FH 1200 Group 2: Ultra | Greetings and Guidelines | Learn How to Succeed in ENGL 4090 | Show up and pay attention | |
| **Wednesday, August 19, 4:20 to 5:35** | Group 2: FH 1200 Group 1: Ultra | Greetings and Guidelines | Learn How to Succeed in ENGL 4090 | Show up and pay attention | |
| **Wednesday, August 19 through Sunday, 11:59 pm, August 23** | Online | 1.Post introduction on Discussion Board 2.Read Chapters 1-3, How People Learn 3.Enter small group discussion group and collaborate on presentation for August 24 and 26 | SLO 1 and 2 Class Participation | 1. See instructions on Introductions Forum 2. See Assignment 1 3. See instructions in your small group discussion | 1.Sun, 11:59 pm 2. Sun, 11:59 pm 3. Presentation in class Aug. 24 and 26 and posted in assignment 1 |

# Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

- What is the point of a SLO?

- How should we write SLOs?

- Where should students find their SLOs?

- How should SLOs be incorporated in course readings, meetings, and assignments?

# ADDITIONAL ACTIVE LEARNING TOOLS ARE PROVIDED IN THE POWERPOINT SLIDES
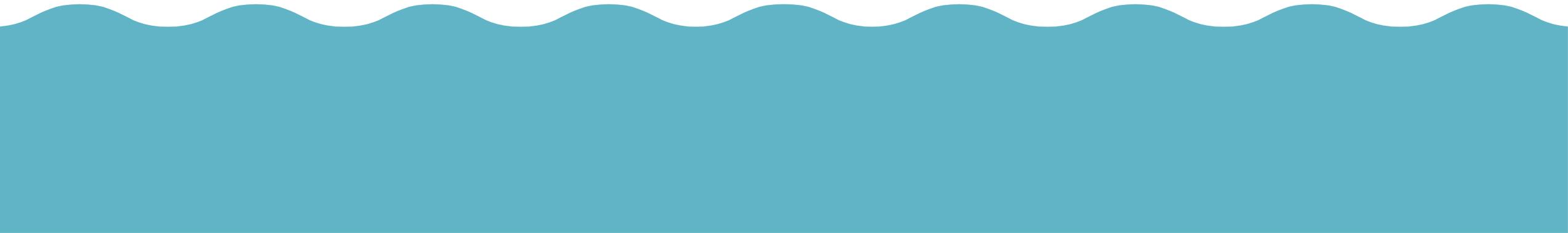
# QUIZZES & WRITING PROMPTS
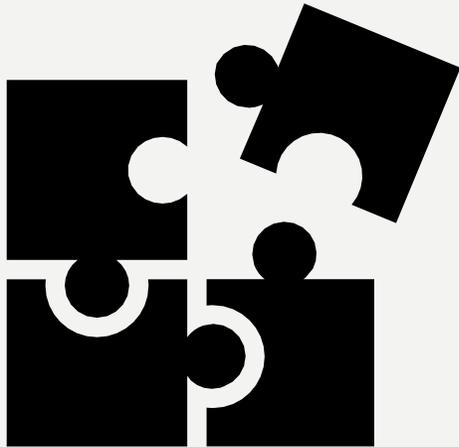
- Quizzing as a learning and assessment tool
  - Encourages students to complete the reading assignments
  - Also provides them with immediate feedback on how well they understood the reading, if you review the responses
  - primes students for the lecture, conversations to come
  - Also provides opportunity to practice what will be required on larger assignments
- Use a brief writing prompt at the start of a class lesson
  - Focus on main points of reading and content you intend to cover in lesson
  - Or ask students to brainstorm about their thoughts on a topic
  - Can be used to generate topical discussions

# PROVIDE FREQUENT, FORMATIVE, AND WISE FEEDBACK

- Students benefit from feedback that provides:
  - Frequent, low stakes assessments that provide information on current performance level and reflects tasks required in higher-stakes assessments
  - Concrete suggestions for improvement
- Goal: Give students valid and reliable data on current state, that predicts future outcomes if current trajectory maintained, and provides feedback that supports growth
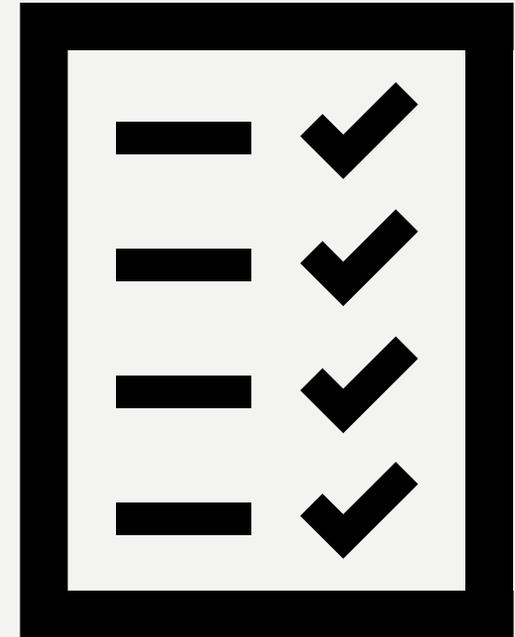
# GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS



- Concept maps graphically illustrate relationships between two or more concepts and are linked by words that describe their relationship

- Brainstorming webs show how different categories of information relate to one another

- Mind Maps are visual representations of hierarchical information that include a central idea or image surrounded by connected branches of associated topics or ideas

- Reviewing students' maps provides valuable information on how well they understand the course material, and creating the map is an effective learning tool for students



For more info, see:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gm1o wf0uGFM_)

Source: http://www.inspiration.com/visual-learning/graphic-organizers
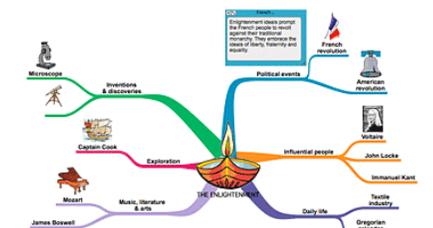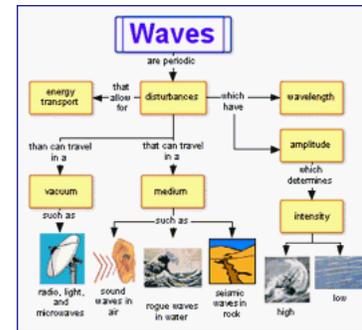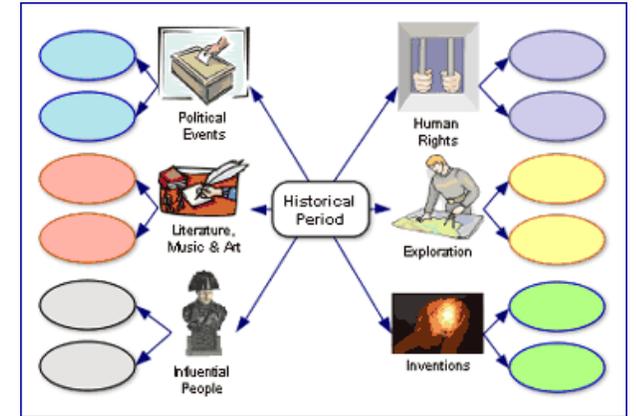
# CLEAREST & MUDDIEST POINT

What main point did you best understand from today's class? Explain it here, in your own words.

What main point was the most confusing or unclear from today's class? Describe what you know about it, and explain (be specific!) what parts are unclear to you.

# WRITE AND JUSTIFY AN EXAM QUESTION

Ask students to write a few questions for an upcoming exam

Share examples of previous exam questions first

And to (1) provide an appropriate response to that question and (2) explainWHY it is an appropriate response

Bonus points: (3) Provide a likely incorrect response and explain why that response is incorrect

Encourage students to share their work

Use BB discussion forum, or compile the questions into a doc that you share with students

And use some of the questions on the next exam

Tell them you will do so when you introduce the activity

- ❏ Valuable study tool for students
- ❏ Provides you with information on gaps in students' understanding that you can address before the exam
- ❏ Provides a sense of transparency that improves students' performance on exams – because they know better what to expect on the exam and feel better prepared for it

# VIRTUAL WORKSHEETS

- Allows students to work through problems, apply learning

    - And get quick feedback (from you or peers)

    - Can be done individually or in small groups (online or in class)

- Provides you with information on students' understanding of course material and can be used for evaluative feedback

Activity - WEIRD Research
Developmental Research Methods – Bartell

Names: _____  _____  _____  _____

1.  Can the norms of the scientific community help to address the influence of western analytic/individualistic minds-sets? How so or why not?

2.  How can you apply what you've learned today to your research proposal?

# # 3
# Fixed Mindset
# and
# Growth Mindset
# in
# Student Learning



## Fixed vs Growth Mindset

**Fixed** | **Growth**

**People with fixed mindsets believe that:**
- Skills, intelligence and talents are natural.
- Failure is shameful and should be avoided.
- Some people are naturally good at things while others are not.
- You are not in control of your abilities.

**Beliefs**

**People with growth mindsets believe that:**
- You have the capacity to learn and grow your skills.
- Failure is a valuable lesson.
- People who are good at something are good because they built that ability.
- You are in control of your abilities.

**Not Necessary or Useful**
See effort as a negative thing and something you do when you're not that good

**Effort**

**Important Part of the Process**
Focused on the process of getting better

**Avoid**
Back down and avoid challenges

**Challenges**

**Embrace**
More likely to embrace challenges and persevere

**Avoid**
Get discouraged when making mistakes and avoid them

**Mistakes**

**Improve**
See mistakes as learning opportunities and ways to improve

**Defensive**
Get defensive, take it personally. Ignores useful criticism/feedback

**Feedback**

**Constructive**
Appreciate feedback and use it. Learns from criticism

# FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT/FEEDBACK

*The Goal:* Design activities that
(1) are tools for active student learning,
(2) can be used by you for evaluative assessment, and
(3) are workload manageable for you and the student

# WISE FEEDBACK:

1. *Feedback description:* Honest description of the student's performance.

2. *Statement of high standards and reasons for feedback:* Acknowledges that you have high standards for student work and that you are providing this feedback as a way to help students grow their abilities.

3. *Assurance of student ability:* Assures student that you are giving them this feedback because you believe student can achieve these high standards

4. *Specific suggestions for improvement:* Provide student with specific, actionable feedback (and resources) to grow their ability

Sources:
https://www.interventioncentral.org/student_motivation_wise_feedback

The Student Experience Project:
https://studentexperienceproject.org/about/

*"I'm giving you these comments because I have high standards for the work in our course, and I know you can meet them. I note in my feedback several places that just missed the mark and offer suggestions on how you can improve for the next assignment."*

*"This course has some challenging concepts, so I am giving you the answers to the most missed questions on the exam so you can understand which questions you need to review. If you are concerned about your score, I want you to know I am confident you can improve by the end of term if you use the resources on the syllabus or go see the TA."*

# GATHER MIDSEMESTER FEEDBACK THAT SUPPORTS GROWTH MINDSET:

## Starfish Early Alert

- Ask students to:
  1. Reflect on their efforts and their learning
  2. Identify 1-2 things that are working well to support their learning in the class
  3. Provide 1-2 suggestions that might improve the learning experience for them
- Then implement 1-2 suggestions, explicitly discussing what you've done and why, linking it back to the student feedback you received
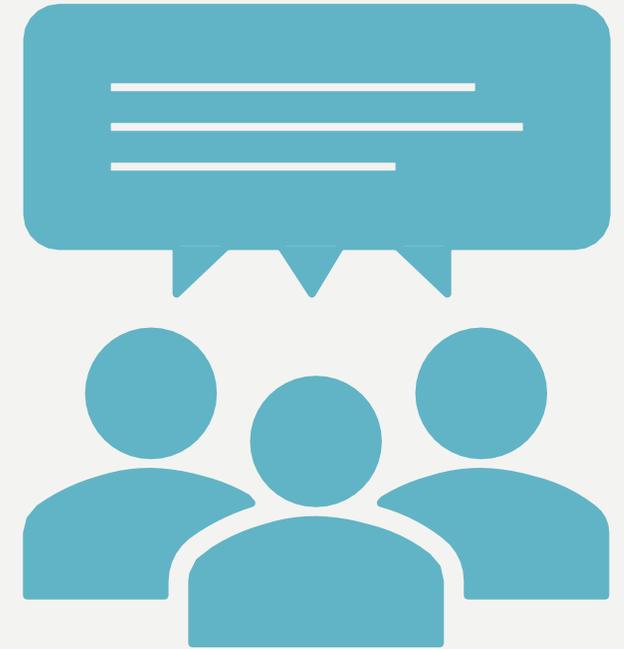
# Return to Equity and Inclusion: Express your commitment early on

For example:

Include a statement about the value of diversity and expectations of mutual respect in your syllabus – cover this in the first class meeting or online session

Be aware of Student Accommodation memos and prepare to meet these accommodations. Also, express to students that you are aware of these accommodations and that you are happy to communicate with them to see that they are met.

Allow students to self-identify their names and pronouns as these may be different than what appear on your roster

Be cognizant of recent events that may invoke feelings of trauma in students. When possible, provide warnings about potentially upsetting content in advance.

Point students to campus resources that provide support for mental health, food instability, financial emergency, tutoring, and so forth.

# Throughout the course

-- Include readings and materials from a diverse representation of authors and other thinkers

-- Discuss how a particular discourse may have been shaped by a majority group and why as well as how it may have been challenged by others

-- Promote campus events that focus on equity and inclusion via email or at the beginning of class

# Practice Visual Literacy

If you use presentation software (EX: PowerPoint) be sure to include images that represent a wide range of people

Be mindful of how films and other visual media portray different groups and individuals

Have your students discuss and reflect upon the images they view in media materials -- who was it made by or for? What messages is it sending about the people depicted?

# Utilize support resources

such as:

-- The Starfish early alert systems

-- Midterm grades

-- Success coaches

Follow up with students to learn why they are struggling and work together to develop a plan to get them on track

# Go Forth

webpage