

The Missing Course. Everything They Never Taught You about College Teaching: A Book Review

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Though experts in their respective specializations, many professors do not have much background in teaching-learning process, and they do not possess sufficient educational strategies fitting for college students. This is evident in many student feedback and is lamented by the stakeholders in the academe. If neglected, this can detrimentally impact not only the value of higher education but also the future of college students who prospectively are the leaders of the present generation. College teaching is not about merely conveying the material to students. To be successful in this field entails more than the capacity to lecture. This calls for professors to refocus on what is the most important—the students. Meanwhile, throughout the review, the term professors shall be utilized to refer to the members of the faculty at a college or university.

David Gooblar is an assistant professor at the University of Iowa. Before that, he was the Associate Director of Temple University’s Center for the Advancement of Teaching. His present research concentrates on higher education and teaching practices. Gooblar is the author of *The Missing Course*, inspired by the realization that most graduate students receive little to nonexistent instruction on pedagogy. Believing that all academics must be brilliant teachers, he crafts this book to help the teaching staff at the university level.

Chapter 1 notes that teachers cannot make students learn for learning is an internal and active process that should be done by learners themselves. It is reminiscent of the popular adage, “You can lead the horse to war, but can never make it drink.” Indeed, professors can never make them learn; what former can do is to help and guide only. Gooblar, hence, advises professors to utilize active learning strategies

achieve better results in the classroom and will offer practical tools to help students learn in any discipline. No prerequisites.

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like discussion and groupwork activities to promote enthusiastic learning. This can lead to a high participation classroom, which is supportive and safe for questions and feedback.

However, the mentioned strategies do not work well all the time; professors should be prepared and mindful about problems like free riding and sucker

effect (Davis, 2009). He suggests beginning the class with a discussion question. The use of lecture is still fine, but it should make students gain understanding, not just facts. To reinforce its conduciveness, it must be well designed, interactive, and engaging to support varied learning styles (Cox & Rogers, 2005). Focusing on skills first than content, he asserts no matter what a professor is teaching, students are the real subjects—the individuals which professors must help.

Chapter 2 recommends making students partners with the professors in the course. First, professors should market their syllabus with fundamental and fascinating problems, and relevance to students' lives. To facilitate that, professors must be conscious of the recently crafted framework of personal meaningfulness by Priniski and colleagues (2018), which pinpoints three types of relevance: (1) personal association; (2) personal usefulness; and (3) identification. These can be helpful to put forward sense-making and appreciation in lessons. Professors must help students learn for themselves, not just to satisfy requirements. If students just continually work just because someone asked them to do it, then they may not realize the value of the skills they are practicing. Worst, they may not be able put forward self-determination in learning, which is requisite in life and in work.

Since professors are in a position of power, if not conscious enough, they may commit abuses of power like disinhibition, objectification, and entitlement to their students (Giray, 2021a). Democratization, learner autonomy, and the avoidance of traditional teacher persona must be emphasized. Students should be given tools to adjust their learning through metacognition. Not only that these can help make professors' lives easier, but they can also understand themselves more as they traverse in their learning journey. Midway through the semester, Gooblar encourages midterm diagnostic evaluation and open discussion on the course's progress. At the end of the course, professors can make students assess themselves, such as their habits of thinking and study practices.

Chapter 3 discusses how professors may enhance their craft by placing students' experiences first and capitalizing on studies in the learning sciences. There are various fallacies and pseudoscience in the field of education that, if not, dealt properly by professors, may detrimentally affect learning. Hence, they should be aware more than anyone else since they are entrusted in terms of facilitation of learning. Plus, if professors know also how to help students practice their skills using research-based strategies like

spacing, interleaving, and variability (Brown et al., 2014), then one can expect that students are in proper hands (see Giray, 2021b).

Moreover, it is recommended that professors deliberately create desirable difficulties for students; the effective usage of tests can be helpful here. If the academic task is too easy, they will be bored. If it is too hard, they may end up being powerless and frustrated. The key is to balance the difficulties given to students so they will be challenged and hence improve. Further, using a list of course readings can make students reinforce their learning, professors can accompany it with reading quizzes. This is pivotal to support their learning and so they will not be dependent on the professors' dictation. If enthusiastic, they can read in advance. Professors must bear in mind that once reading is done, then there must be a test comprehension and connection also so that learning becomes deeper.

Asserting the coherence between course goals and assignments, Gooblar contends that clear expectations and using student language must manifest in assignments. The problem is many professors just provide course materials using still the jargon used among professors. Providing example work is good, also. This is to help students grasp concretely the task and to emulate its positive features. He also puts forward peer review as a tool to improve student work; through that, they can receive other perspectives which help build scholarly camaraderie among students.

Chapter 4 contends that professors should be flexible when dealing with students, most especially that they will encounter various types of students. For instance, students with disabilities, physical or mental, should be given accommodations. They have a hard time adjusting the higher education environment and have a high attrition rate (Adams & Proctor, 2010). This is not to excuse people from learning; rather, it is to encourage them to do so. Professors frequently make accommodations, even for students who do not have special needs, without realizing it; for example, reviewing before major examinations, utilizing presentations, and so on. The more the professors respond to a range of student needs, the more learning is reinforced.

To understand students' preconceptions, professors are advised to conduct surveys about the subject matter and to self-assess their strengths and weaknesses. Gooblar encourages the formation of a collaborative community in the class; some ways are for students to share individual learning goals, talking

about non-academic interests. Deviating from serious and formal tone and shifting to casual conversations can spark deep conversations that are also important to their development. This can remind that they are not task-answering machines and fortifies the human in them. Groupwork can also encourage interdependence. This interdependence is an important skill that is necessary to hone since it is ubiquitously needed in life and at work. All this pinpoint that students must have a space where they are allowed to become themselves.

Chapter 5 argues that providing thoughtful feedback on student work transforms them into independent learners. When professors do not give feedback to students, the students will have a difficulty to progress. Hence, taking time to undertake this shall help both parties attain quality results in learning. Gooblar suggests following a feedback loop for learning facilitation: (1) the student tries and fails; (2) the teacher detects the error and helps the student comprehend why a failure occurred; and (3) the student makes a correction, and the cycle continues. Furthermore, he contends that genuine learning comes from practice and awareness of past mistakes. Hence, professors should give them space to undertake such activities. Surely, helping students understand that concept may mitigate cheating since they realize the value of challenges in learning. The probability of students resorting to illicit shortcuts may decrease. Through the feedback system, students compare their status from their previous performance, not with their contemporaries.

Reviewing test results by small groups, wrong-answers tests, and two-stage exams can give students opportunities to bolster their learning. About assignments, students are encouraged to provide a draft of their work, so professors can give comments and the former can refine it. All this aids the learning practice and can make students not be irritated when they encounter mistakes. Professors also shift from being an autocratic judge stance, who mercilessly adjudicates without giving points for improvement, to being an archetypal sage, who counsels and guides the young souls. Additionally, the author pinpoints that providing a checklist can help students undertake self-correction. Learning to correct oneself is a skill that is needed for independence and individual maturity because not all the time that professors and seasoned figures are around there in life to help. Moreover, Gooblar suggests that when students fail, the professor should reach out to them one more time to discuss what went wrong, not to further justify the grade.

Chapter 6 contends that by emphasizing the process, students learn more than just by aiming for good

grades. If the case is students just obsess themselves too much about the grades, then that it superficial and is not truly indicative of learning. Professors must help students not confuse grades with learning, and diploma with competencies. Meanwhile, Gooblar says that professors should become a model of confidence in the class—conviction and credibility. This can translate to an atmosphere of security since they know there is an expert guiding them. Having that in mind, this leads to effective learning experience. However, professors should also model uncertainty. It puts forward rethinking. Due to advancement of scholarship and research, the answer professors know may not be the current and updated answer. Hence, if they have not checked the recent development or updates for that specific topic, then they must be honest and curious.

When professors admit that they do not know something, it can be the starting point of the discovery process. This projects a kind of confidence that they can do something about it, instead of pretending to be an omniscient god. Students will get to learn that it is fine not to know everything, and they feel comfortable being ignorant on the topic, which they can use to put forward research and reasoning. Professors also should model scholarly behavior like crediting people's ideas and sharing their work with students. This can make the latter walk the talk. When professors instruct students to obey those rules, without them exemplifying them in the first place, it may lead to questions on integrity or academic character. On the other hand, manifesting them directly can make students imbibe those attributes. Using participation logs also can accentuate the value of the process. Further, he recommends that professors can use the “do-it-wrong” strategy where students deliberately make mistakes. This may be unusual since they are used to doing things correctly, but this teaches them to think outside the box and more about the process.

Chapter 7 considers that an inclusive classroom makes everyone feel comfortable to learn and participate in the class even those with disabilities, let it be physical, mental, visible, or not. Professors must be mindful of their implicit biases that can handicap equality and fairness in the class. This is reminiscent of the concept of psychological safety which puts forward that feeling that people are free to convey their inquiries and sentiments without retaliation or other negative consequences (Edmondson, 2018). While some are afraid to include political topics in the class since it may hurt feelings and can make the class chaotic, the advice of Gooblar is different; he encourages them to do the opposite—that is, to embrace political topics so that students are prepared for complex and meaningful discussions.

Nevertheless, professors should not indoctrinate students as if their opinions are superior. Intellectual humility and open-mindedness should prevail still. It must be done with the approach that everyone is respected, and views tolerated. Delving deeper into how students think and how they come up with their opinions are worthy to talk about, also. Moreover, Gooblar believes that professors should help students develop into more capable, ethical, and critical citizens. Graduates who are bounded by the books or who just regurgitate information cannot help impact the positively. Healthy habits of the mind and being critical about prejudices and biases should be taught. Meanwhile, it is pivotal that professors equip students with an armamentarium of skills, like information literacy and verification of sources, which can immunize them from misinformation, disinformation, and other forms of propagandistic deception.

Chapter 8 adds some tips to aid professors to progress on their job. First, he suggests drafting teaching and assures that it is fine to have terrible drafts. It may be disorganized but this surely generates creativity. During this stage, he encourages to put new and risky ideas on paper without restrictions. After that is the revision process where the professor can refine their course. Second, professors should adjust in the mid-semester, utilizing the feedback from students; this requires confidence and wisdom. Here, students' current position in learning is valued. Third and the most crucial, they must regularly reflect. One way is writing down what worked well after the class.

Student evaluation, though not perfect, can also be used for reflection. It must not be dismissed like a garbage. Professors who do that are self-centered. When used wisely, this offers perspectives which can be considered to further improve the craft of being a professor. Gooblar proposes observing someone else's room because it can reveal little ways each professor differs and can get to see the students' point of view. Meanwhile, the author recognizes that faculty burnout is a real phenomenon and encourages that they maintain their psychological health through taking time off and cultivating other interests. Other ways to prevent or reduce is through reconnecting with social networks, asking help, and sleeping (Kennette & Lin, 2019).

This book is a great resource for both entrant and seasoned professors in the field of higher education, regardless of their specialization, since this tackles the general college teaching which can cut across

various colleges and departments. While this does not delve into the technical aspect of college teaching and the psychology of learning, this book surely has several comments and suggestions for professors which are helpful. This is also coupled with personal rich personal narratives which have made it a smooth read and very engaging. Wanting to make a change and out of frustration regarding the lack of understanding in the field of college teaching, this book has become a catalyst. A good contribution in the arena of higher education, its content is practical, empowering, and perceptive.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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