

RADFORD UNIVERSITY

Seven Habits of Highly Effective Instructors of Freshmen*

*With sincere apologies to Stephen R. Covey

1. The most effective instructors of freshmen are cognizant that their students are dealing with multiple transition issues.

Contrary to what some of our non-academic friends and neighbors and legislators believe, facilitating the learning of college students is very hard work—and teaching freshmen can be especially frustrating. Some freshmen come to us woefully unprepared for college. In addition to their HD TVs, Playstations, and microfridges, they often bring with them tons of personal baggage—toxic relationships, unsupportive families, mental health issues, etc.—that have the potential to get in the way of their academic success.

Moreover, they are frequently overwhelmed by and unprepared for the differences between high school and college. While not all students' high school experiences are identical, here are just some of the academic transitions most must make:

High School Seniors	College Freshmen
School day begins around 8:00 a.m. and ends around 3:00 p.m. Each day is the same.	First class may be in the early morning; last class may end after 9:00 p.m. Each day may be different.
Heavily structured 8:00-3:00 day	Great flexibility; every day includes multiple hours of "free" time
Assigned readings are frequently discussed thoroughly in class; no consequences for students if they do not do the readings	Assigned readings may never be discussed, but students may be tested on them
Frequent quizzes/tests on small amounts of material	Infrequent quizzes/tests on large amounts of material
Learning = memorizing facts. Students are frequently told exactly what they need to know through pre-exam study guides and worksheets	Learning involves reasoning, critical thinking, and processing and applying concepts and principles. Students must ascertain what is important
Role of teachers: transmitting knowledge to student	Role of faculty: facilitating student learning
Frequently easy to turn to nearby family and friends for comfort and support when things go wrong	Must make an effort to establish new support networks when assistance is needed
Are offered numerous extra credit opportunities	Are rarely offered extra credit opportunities
Often cheat to improve grades; standards of academic integrity rarely enforced	Must not cheat; standards of academic integrity strictly enforced and penalties are severe
Consequences of poor performance are minimal	Poor performance in the first semester could result in probation or suspension
Assume they will pass/graduate because most high schools are under pressure to graduate all students	Are surprised (and expect exceptions, which are not possible) when they face academic action for below average performance

Freshmen are simultaneously facing multiple personal and social transitions that have the potential to impact their academic success—everything from sharing a room for the first time, to dealing with homesickness, to managing money, to dealing with easy access to alcohol, to learning to ask “strangers” for help. While they have been enrolled in school for 12 or more years, moving from one grade to the next has heretofore been relatively seamless. However, as Mike Dunn, Director of New Student Programs, told the new students and families this summer at Quest: “The freshman year is not grade 13.” Almost everything is different and new for them, especially if they are first generation students, which over one-third of Radford University freshmen are.

Given this reality, it is remarkable that any freshmen succeed. However, most do. To a significant degree, this is because during the critical first semester, their faculty understood the challenges freshmen were experiencing, took an interest in them as individuals, connected with them, and encouraged them to be the best they could be.

A continual theme running through the comments of the most effective instructors is the importance of one’s awareness of freshmen transition issues. During those exasperating times when freshmen seem uninterested, detached, or even intellectually hostile, these instructors step back; reflect upon the fact that their students largely are not “us” (i.e., during the past academic year, 88% of teaching faculty had earned at least a master’s degree, but only 36% of our freshmen said that they planned to seek one); consider the adjustments freshmen are making; and take actions to facilitate their success.

The first step is humanizing themselves and their students . . .

2. The most effective instructors of freshmen are approachable.

Virtually every instructor who participated in this project mentioned something about how important it is that freshmen feel comfortable in their classes. This begins with making an effort to get to know students’ names:

Shawn Brenneman, Instructor, Information Technology: I have 100 students [each semester], and by week three I know their names and have a feel for their work. Students are not anonymous in my class. They know I know who they are and how they are doing in the class.

Matt Oyos, Professor, History: Freshmen are moving from one social and educational world to another as they transition from high school to college. During the first semester in particular, they experience understandable anxiety as they adjust to new people and living situations, and they wonder if they will be able to handle collegiate work. Knowing that they are not simply a face in the crowd and that their professor is approachable can facilitate their transition to this new life. I try to accomplish this goal in many ways. In face-to-face classes, I make sure to learn every student’s name. This goal can get rather daunting when 150 faces are looking back at me during a semester, but so far I have managed it.

Joe Wirgau, Associate Professor, Chemistry: I try to get to class ten minutes early to talk with students and of course learn their names quickly and call them by name.

While getting to know students’ names is important, the best instructors take it one step further, by getting to know freshmen as individuals:

Kim Herbert, Instructor, Communications: I spend a lot of time before class talking to my students. I like to walk around the room and ask about their weekends, transition to Radford, other courses, etc. I believe that this is important so that they feel like they have a faculty member that they can openly communicate with.

Eric Sorensen, Instructor, Mathematics and Statistics: I arrive in the classroom five or ten minutes early to get set up, so that I can begin the class on time. As I am preparing, I engage students in conversations that typically have nothing to do with math; I try to find out a bit about their activities and interests so that I can talk with them about what they are doing outside of classes; e.g., “How was opening night?” “Tough game last night” “Did you see . . .?” “What do you think about . . .” I try to find out where they are from, since there are often big differences between students from Northern Virginia, say, and those from far southwest.

Dr. Oyos: I take advantage of time before each class to banter with students to get to know them better and also allow them to learn more about me. This is obviously more of a challenge in online courses, but I share a video about myself and my interests at the outset of each course, and discussion forums become a place where we may add in personal perspective on an issue. This all improves the learning environment, for as students become more acquainted with each other, they seem more comfortable with making contributions, and are more likely to visit during office hours. Knowing the students also allows me to relate material in ways that will seem more relevant to them. All in all, it makes teaching more fun, and, presumably, learning more enjoyable for the students.

Ms. Herbert: On the first day of class, I require that my students fill out a student information sheet that contains 20 questions about their interests (television shows, movies, musicians, etc.), hobbies, goals, etc. I use this information to come up with relatable examples in my lectures. Students often comment on how much they enjoy my pop culture references and television/movie clips.

Kaitlynn Slaughter, Instructor, Art: As an artist, I know that everyone has their own style, and that carries over into other disciplines as well. At the beginning of each semester as their first grade, I have students submit a document answering the following questions: What is your major? What kind of art education have you had? Have you ever been to a museum or art show? What do YOU hope to get out of this class? The answers are extremely diverse - I have students who haven't been asked to "make" something since middle school, students from Northern Virginia who love going into DC to museums, and students who believe they've never even seen a piece of art in person. With 50+ students in a class, my job is to make sure each of them leaves with some kind of further knowledge and appreciation of art, and these questions really help me find a way to try to tailor the class to them.

Amy VanKirk, Associate Professor, Dance: It is important that we listen to our freshmen. I don't think they should be coddled, but if you pay attention and listen, and then check in, that can make the difference for many young students. For example, if someone is upset, I may inquire what is wrong. I then make note of what is wrong and check in with them a few days later to see how they are. Many of them are stunned that I remembered in the first place. So many freshman have tough transitions I think it is important to put in a bit of extra time and effort to really pay attention, especially when we have so many students coming in with anxiety/depression issues. A simple "how are you," or "how is your friend who was sick" can make a big difference. A lot of freshmen just want assurance that they are not alone.

Demonstrating a positive attitude is always important:

Dr. Wirgau: I try to get negativity out of the classroom. I come with a smile, I always describe chemistry as a happy positive place (that's why there are more metals (+) on the periodic table – the universe/creator wanted chemistry to be a positive place), and immediately spin any grumbling in the classroom. Negativity spreads like a plague and I learned this the hard way a decade ago, so now I actively fight it.

Ms. Slaughter: For me, it all kind of comes down to letting my students know that I want them to enjoy my class. Which kind of sounds silly, I know, but it is honestly amazing to see how many students come in believing that learning about art is a chore and has nothing to do with them.

Mr. Sorensen: I try to inject humor in the class and smile often.

A statement that is, as far as I can tell, a paraphrase of something once said by Teddy Roosevelt would seem to apply here: “Students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” The last word supporting this practice will go to . . .

Mr. Sorensen: For me, the bottom line is that I try to treat my students the way I would want faculty to treat my own children.

3. The most effective instructors of freshmen establish, communicate, and hold students to reasonable performance expectations.

The vast majority of freshmen enter college with no idea of what to expect; this is especially true if they are enrolled in a course in a discipline with which they have no familiarity. It is imperative that faculty outline their expectations clearly and directly as early in the term as possible.

The literature is clear that freshmen prefer and perform better in learning environments that are structured rather than unstructured and organized rather than disorganized. The best instructors make good use of the first days of class by making sure that freshmen fully understand the standards to which they will be held. They then repeatedly remind students of those expectations. When it comes to classes enrolling primarily freshmen, there is evidence that the course syllabus can never contain too much information.

Nancy Taylor, Instructor, English: I am very specific with assignment requirements and post assignment sheets in more than one place. Many freshmen re-enter the “literal” phase where everything needs to be concrete. This is not to say that assignments should not offer plenty of room for critical thinking and personal interpretation, but rather that the parameters need to be clearly defined. Outcomes and assessment should also be clear by possibly listing the learning outcomes on the assignment and/or providing a grading rubric. I post all assignments to D2L in a unit folder and again in the assignment dropbox, plus I often email the major assignment sheets to students as well.

Ms. Brenneman: I am clear with students about what is necessary to succeed in my class, and I reward best practices. While I strive to have the course grade ultimately reflect a student’s level of understanding of the material, small portions of the grade are allotted to practices which will lead to success in the class, such as attendance and participation.

One should never sugarcoat the difficulty of the work students will be asked to complete:

Jason Davis, Associate Professor, Biology: I think it’s important to be honest. Not brutally, but unabashedly. If something is hard, I tell them it’s hard. If most people fail at a given thing, I say so. In preparing freshmen for major classes I talk about class averages, failure rates, etc. I also talk about the habits, work ethic and interests of successful students – depending on the class, I may even showcase deans’ scholars or upper-level research students.

In disciplines with which students have some familiarity, helping them realize what they already know may be reassuring for them:

Dr. Oyos: I show the students what they already know. New students may be intimidated and lacking confidence in their own abilities and prior knowledge. The amount of information in a college-level course might seem overwhelming to some. I try to give students a sense that they already possess many of the tools needed for success. I tend to employ methods that will allow students to discover this insight for themselves. Although they may not have the knowledge specific to a topic, they can learn that they have the ability to analyze a problem or critique a historical issue. In my courses, this insight might be gained, for example, through discussions or various group exercises, which lead to other benefits in course dynamics. This approach also helps to move students away from “just the facts please,” to using more universal skills such as interpretation and analysis.

While structure and organization are important to freshmen, faculty must also allow for some flexibility:

Ms. VanKirk: I try to “read the room.” I think sometimes people get caught up in lesson plans, but being able to tell how the class is doing as a whole should inform your plan. Sometimes this means spending more time on something that seems overwhelming and skipping things you realize are not as integral to the overall goals of the course/week, etc. For example, when an issue came up with health, I decided to have a discussion about that and “check in” instead of teaching my original lesson.

Giving freshmen direction as they prepare for exams, especially first exams, is also helpful, lest they waste time focusing on the wrong material:

Carter Turner, Professor, Philosophy and Religious Studies: I try to make it very clear what information will be on the exam. New students struggle to know where to put their study energies, so I try to take most of my questions directly from the outline or PowerPoint. I don’t have an attendance policy, but I explain repeatedly throughout the semester that the absolute best way to do well in my class is to attend – that the exam questions come from the lecture/PowerPoint.

Tara Phelps-Durr, Associate Professor, Biology: In my experience freshmen struggle the most with 1) time-management and 2) underestimating expectations. Most students are capable of doing great work but they honestly do not know what instructors mean when they say “read the chapter carefully” or “clearly and succinctly write an essay that addresses . . .” and they seriously underestimate how long it takes to complete assignments. I emphasize the importance of carefully reading instructions before the student begins an assignment. I encourage questions about assignments, and I use D2L and show my students how to use it. I try to model good time management skills by providing a calendar on D2L that shows the final due dates for assignments AND provides a timeline for how far along a student should be on future assignments.

Providing study tips to inexperienced learners can be very helpful. For example,

Dr. Turner: I encourage my freshmen to try to understand the theories we cover broadly rather than just memorizing bits and pieces of them. I explain that exams cause anxiety and anxiety clogs the pathways in the brain so students need to be able to think their way to answers they might not know immediately. The only way to do that is to be able to explain the theories and theorist wholly rather than piecemeal. Studying with a friend and using cue cards help with that.

Students—even freshmen—are usually surprisingly adept at surmounting whatever bar we establish for them. It is incumbent upon us to set the bar appropriately high, to help students see where the bar has been set, and to facilitate development of the skills and abilities it takes to leap over it.

4. The most effective instructors of freshmen provide their students with early and frequent feedback.

Despite the best efforts of faculty to communicate course expectations (sometimes in great detail!) freshmen sometimes remain disbelievers: “The test certainly can’t cover six chapters and four weeks of lectures.” “There’s no way that this paper really has to be four pages long.” One of the most frequently utilized best practices in teaching freshmen is to offer them early and frequent performance feedback. This is important not only because many freshmen report that they were able to earn good grades in high school with minimal effort, but also because they typically had numerous graded assignments—and therefore, frequent opportunities to improve their grades.

Ms. Brenneman: I grade early, often, and quickly. Many freshmen are not ready for college-level work. They need a lot of feedback early so they understand how they are doing. I give them lots of individual feedback and grades that reflect the amount of material they understand so they can gauge how they are doing.

Joel Hagen, Professor, Biology: I have more small graded assignments, rather than relying completely on a few exams for assessment. Most students (especially freshmen) procrastinate. Having frequent quizzes and other small assignments keeps them on track. This approach also means that tests are worth a smaller part of the total grade, which may lessen test anxiety.

Dr. Wirgau: To help students come to class and look at material between lectures, I have 5- minute pop quizzes at the start of class. I do this for roughly 50% of my classes (and almost every Friday)—often enough that students don’t feel they can get lucky if they cut class, and often enough that it is part of class and not a “gotcha” moment. I provide the ungraded homework problem the quiz will be based on “if we have a quiz” by email 48 hours in advance, and they can ask me for help on the question up until class starts. It is really as much an effort check as a true test of chemical knowledge. I also like to establish a positive mindset by never dropping a grade. I will double the highest (or two highest) quiz/homework score(s), so a 100% on a quiz becomes a 200%. This helps mathematically more than dropping a grade, and I explain to students why this is the case.

Don Braffitt, Instructor, Information Technology: I give credit for everything I think contributes to student success, particularly class attendance and participation. I have found, especially with freshman, that I need to give appropriate course credit for the things I have found that contribute to student success. I have adopted a practice I learned at the 2006-2007 New Faculty Institute. Every student has an index card on which they record their class attendance and participation each lecture. At the end of each lecture, I give students a short, 1-2 minute, one question quiz related to one of the lecture topics, and they record their answers on the cards. I collect the cards at the end of each lecture, and students pick up their cards at the beginning of each lecture. The quiz question is not graded for correctness, but completion of the one question quiz each lecture is how I measure attendance and participation, and student grades each week are partially based on this attendance and participation. Also, when a student comes to office hours with a question, we can easily review that student's card (which eventually records an entire semester of lecture attendance and participation). I can use the results

each day (quickly glancing through the cards) to gauge student understanding of at least one point I tried to emphasize during lecture.

Ms. VanKirk: I make every effort to provide my student with individual and constructive assessments of their performance. I do this for all of my classes, but when possible I think this is especially important for freshmen. Giving constructive feedback lets them know that even if you are really pushing them, it is because you want them to succeed.

The GTF Mentoring Program in English encourages a system of early, small-stakes writing assignments; “small-“ or “low-stakes” is a term used by Chris Anson to describe smaller, lower point assignments in which students can practice the skills and knowledge needed before having larger, higher point assignments:

Frank Napolitano, Associate Professor, English: [Low-stakes] assignments can serve several functions, often simultaneously. First, they communicate to the instructor what the students are and are not learning from the class. Second, they communicate the instructors’ expectations to students. Third, they can prepare students for the types of work or thinking that will be expected of them in their major assignments and in their disciplines in general. These assignments take very little time to grade (often no time at all) and deliver a lot of bang for their buck. If instructors want to learn more about these types of assignments, they should check out John C. Bean’s *Engaging Ideas*, 2nd ed.

Ms. Taylor: I make many low-stakes assignments leading up to larger assignments and give grades and feedback frequently and quickly. Freshmen, especially, need early feedback on work and they need that feedback more quickly than most upperclassmen do. If I have a set of papers to respond to from a freshman class and a sophomore class, I will always grade the freshman work first.

Dr. Phelps-Durr: At the beginning of the semester, I assign small, low-stakes assignments that will not have a large impact on the final grade if the student does not perform well. I provide a lot of feedback (both written and oral) on these first assignments. When assigning larger, multi-week projects, I break down the work into smaller assignments and provide feedback at each step.

Dr. Davis: Freshmen may be nervous but they’re also often over-confident and don’t recognize how a small mistake can snowball into a big disruption in their path to success. Giving them real feedback, even if it’s harsh, is absolutely useful for them.

There is also some advantage to giving freshmen ways to self-assess their understanding of course material:

Mr. Braffitt: I regularly include self-graded quizzes (with questions randomly selected from a large testbank) which I allow students to complete an unlimited number of times, generally within a week-long period. The highest grade counts for each weekly quiz, and students get immediate feedback with an answer key.

Given their early uncertainty about their skills and abilities, it is important, as Ms. Taylor implies above, that freshmen receive feedback on assignments as soon as they can be evaluated:

Mr. Sorensen: I provide students with “instant” feedback on their performance by returning their graded assignments during the next class period if at all possible.

5. The most effective instructors of freshmen use engaging activities to facilitate student learning.

In our social-media-driven, short-attention-span world, a common lament of faculty is that students want to be entertained, not taught. While those of us who were educated in the “chalk and talk” world can become justifiably frustrated when our students tune us out during even our most compelling lectures, we must realize that “engaging” and “entertaining” are not the same thing—and students learn best if they are engaged in and see personal connections with our subject matter. The most effective instructors of freshmen use strategies that reflect learner-centered teaching:

Ms. VanKirk: I try to practice student-centered learning. Freshmen are at an odd time in their lives where they feel like they know everything, but they are also overwhelmed and feel like they know nothing at the same time. By giving them a role in the learning process, they can build their confidence and also stay engaged during the class time. I execute this by having them do partner or group work, make their own decisions, catch them off guard and have them teach something to the class, etc.

Dr. Davis: I always try to remember that freshmen are brand spanking new to the college classroom, and as such they're often emotionally unprepared. High school was just busy work and memorization for many of them, and they generally expect college to be more of the same. To combat their apathy and “too-cool-for-schoolness,” I try to make a point of developing high engagement instructional activities; discussions, open-ended questions, research projects, etc. They don't know very much yet, but it's never too early to start getting them to question their assumptions and to push their boundaries. In my limited experience it helps to avoid lecturing and rote work (pre-fab labs in particular) and to ask them to think for themselves.

Ms. Herbert: I assign group work—a lot of group work! After each lecture, my students engage in hands-on learning so that they may apply the material. This is mostly accomplished in groups. I try to mix up groups as much as possible so that freshmen work with older students.

Dr. Hagen: I have reduced the amount of time spent lecturing and expanded small group activities, discussion, etc. Even casual observers should be aware that many (most?) students do not take notes the way we did. Getting students more directly engaged with course material is probably a better way for them to learn—and it certainly makes for a more interesting class experience for both students and teachers. The “flipped classroom” is an extreme form of this technique, but even reducing lecture to 50% can make a big difference in student engagement.

Ms. Slaughter: What works the best for me is encouraging students to explore their own academic interests and backgrounds in my class. Art Appreciation has the beautiful quality that allows almost any kind of interdisciplinary research or work imaginable—the science of how we physically see color, the psychology behind color aesthetics, how art and religion go hand-in-hand throughout history. I try my best to make sure that I emphasize the crossing over of topics because it makes art so much more relate-able. In turn, I feel like my students come out of my class not only knowing more about art, but they are more likely to continue thinking about art in their everyday life.

Jeff Pittges, Associate Professor and Chair, Information Technology, highly recommends the book Learner-Centered Teaching (2nd ed.), by Maryellen Weimer to those who teach freshmen. In Dr. Pittges' words, “the main theme is that many students are dependent learners, and we need to transform those students into independent learners. We need to

stop 'telling' students and have them start 'doing.' Learning by doing leads to far deeper understanding, and it teaches students how to learn."

6. The most effective instructors of freshmen effectively manage the learning environment, both in and out of class.

Freshmen will quickly turn us off if we do not treat them with the same respect we expect from them. Faculty can go a long way toward teaching freshmen academic "survival skills" by practicing and modeling them. If we want students to ask questions, we must answer them respectfully. If we want them to be on time for class, we must start class on time. If we want them to avoid procrastination, we should return graded assignments as soon as we can. If we want them to observe standards of civility and academic integrity, we must enforce them.

Dr. Davis: I try never to give answers like "you won't understand this yet" or "that's for later classes." If they ask a question that's beyond the scope I'll get into it as much as I can in the time I have and then offer to talk more after. It helps them to see the depth of the topic, and it probably increases their respect for you as an expert. You don't want them to think you're just here killing time or that you don't know what you're talking about.

Mr. Sorensen: I am "painfully organized." I respect students' time; I tell them that I begin and end my classes on time, and then I do so. In addition, I try to always remember that freshmen are not as intellectually and socially mature as my teaching colleagues and I, and that they are encountering multiple transition issues that may get in the way of their success. No matter how inane a question might be or how many times I have been asked it, I never want to embarrass or humiliate a student.

Ms. Brenneman: I am aware that students in my course will cheat. We have had semesters where we charged up to 20% of the class with violations of academic integrity standards. I investigate cheating when I suspect it has occurred, and I deal with it. This is never pleasant, but it is necessary unless I want students to think my class is a joke. This adds a considerable workload to any faculty member; however, it is necessary to protect the value of the course and of an RU degree for the non-cheaters.

Dr. Wirgau: I encourage questions in class, even if somewhat off the mark. I will answer any question posed; yes, if we get too far off time- or topic-wise, I may have to cut my response short or finish up by email, but everything is encouraged. There is nothing worse than walking into a 100% quiet classroom. There should be a buzz of energy.

Mr. Sorensen: If I receive an email from a student with a question about course material, I respond within 12 hours unless there are extenuating circumstances; most typically, I respond as soon as I have the time to do so. In my response, I always thank the student for asking the question, and I make sure that the student knows that I welcome additional questions if there are any. I believe that if the student can see my dedication to those enrolled in my course, my dedication will be reciprocated by students who take their work seriously.

Mr. Braffitt: I start classes with some motivating material not necessarily from the text. I often begin with a short (30 seconds - 2 minutes) video or television commercial or cartoon or news article related to the material for the week. My goal is to have students better digest the material from the text beyond the text readings I expect students to complete before they come to class.

Dr. Turner: I encourage my students to come to my office regularly if they are struggling to understand the material. Once they come, they realize how helpful it is to them, but they seem reluctant to come by the first time.

Some faculty make a five-minute meeting during their office hours early in the semester a graded assignment. Since the inception of the course, freshmen enrolled in UNIV 100 have been required to meet with one of their faculty; the goal of this assignment is to demystify the faculty-student relationship so that students realize, as Dr. Turner mentions, how valuable such meetings can be.

7. The most effective instructors of freshmen understand that there is a life outside the classroom—and encourage students to take advantage of all that Radford University offers.

While the tendency is to think of “retention initiatives” as those designed to help marginal students succeed, RU loses too many good students who have been unable to find stimulating academic opportunities—even though there are myriad possibilities on their doorstep.

Radford University is an incredibly rich learning environment. Our students can participate in over 250 clubs and organizations and graduate with a broad portfolio of social, cultural, and intellectual experiences. While there is a temptation for students to partake too much in the “fun” side of college, we should begin explaining to them as freshmen that there will be great value in their participating in disciplinary clubs and activities and in stretching themselves intellectually.

Dr. Davis: I try to get them engaged in the academic life of the school beyond the classroom. They’re going to hear about club fair and parties and fun things in their dorms. They often don’t hear about academic clubs, speakers, events, etc. And they definitely don’t hear enough about programs like OURS/SURF, SCI, study abroad, etc. Even though I don’t usually give extra credit, I make a point of letting them know about these things and a point of telling them when I’m going. They need to know that success in college isn’t just about getting good grades.

Dr. Wirgau: I point out things occurring on campus in the next week to make it clear that they need to be doing more than getting good grades to be successful at college and beyond. The last question on most of my tests is: “What is one thing you’ve done since the last test that was not part of a course that you have done to help your professional/career development?”

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Many are familiar with [the Starfish Story](#) about the young man who, while he cannot rescue every starfish, makes a difference in the lives of those he can save. It is a parable that all of those who teach freshmen should take to heart. Each semester, dedicated faculty who teach freshmen “save” dozens of freshmen starfish, most of whom will never express their appreciation or even realize—at least not in the moment—the impact their instructors have had upon them. On behalf of all freshmen students, from the clueless who frustrate you to the rockstars who make it all feel worthwhile, I sincerely thank you.