

Step 1

Image Management

This lesson is largely in the form of a sequence of contextual observations and strategies, which are entitled “Image Management.” This is our attempt to encourage students to begin to *enact* engaged being and seeing. We do this by illustrating that certain styles of being and seeing convey that you are taking life seriously so that people inside and outside of school want to take you seriously as a thoughtful person and want to work with you, instead of going around you.

“Let’s begin with a question: What are the differences between learning and producing work in high school and college?”

It always amazes us that most of the students we encounter, regardless of background, have no idea how to answer this question. Despite the fact that many of them have taken at least one Advanced Placement class or have participated in Socratic Seminars or other best practice formats for delivering instruction, most high school students are clueless when it comes to understanding what will be demanded of them in a college seminar room or lab. This strikes us as important, considering the strength of the college and career preparation push that has taken hold in schools and that is promoted by the evolving standards movement. The fact is, most high school students have not seen a solid college research paper as an exemplar or discussed the kinds of thinking that is demanded in the classes that they will encounter in college. For those reasons, we take time to try to bridge the gap in the following ways:

What are college classes like and what will I have to do to succeed?

In college/university there are two basic kinds of classes:

1) Lectures in which an expert or professor speaks to students, providing ideas, concepts or information.

2) Seminars and labs in which students try to answer a question that doesn't have a right answer. In a seminar, a small number of students sit around a long table with a professor and face--not a blackboard or screen--but each other. The idea behind a seminar is that the **people around the table** are responsible for developing—not copying down--answers.

In a college seminar, students (like you) develop answers to open-ended questions using the methods that are the essence of a major. English majors have a method for solving certain kinds of problems—it is based on the skill of interpretation. Sociology majors have a method for solving certain problems—it is based on observation, questioning and analysis. Indeed, these majors, fields of study, disciplines, are best thought of as methods for answering particular questions or solving puzzles. In college students want to demonstrate that that they good at using one or several of these methods to solve important questions or puzzles. For example, how can the methods of Sociology help us understand how gangs operate? This is not the same as reading a lot of books about gangs, remembering a lot of information on gangs, or doing well on a test about gangs. The best college students know how to get leverage on the problems they care about with one or more methods.

Seminars are the most fun when all the members of the seminar are “into it” and fully engaged. This doesn't mean they are smart; it means they are taking it seriously. Most students that Bill encounters at Duke want the other students in their seminar to be **at least** as engaged as they are, **at least** as interested in what is going on as they are, and **at least** as prepared for the next class as they are. The intensity that engaged, interested and prepared students bring to a

seminar discussion is evident in the ways that body language and ideas create a vibrant atmosphere. This energy makes all sorts of creative and productive things possible.

What We Say to Our Students about Engagement:

- “Being engaged is important in every walk of life and it is critically important in research. People don’t want to be interviewed by someone who doesn’t seem to care, or who isn’t into what he/she is doing.”
 - “Would you agree to give an hour and half of your time to do an in-depth interview with someone who didn’t seem to be all that interested in the topic, whose body language communicated that they really didn’t care, or who made it clear they didn’t know what they were talking about?”
- “Being engaged is something **you** want to be able to do when you need to. Indeed, among the things you want to be known for—a good athlete, caring person etc.—is the ability to be engaged, especially mentally. You want people in college— your classmates and professors—to take you seriously as a thoughtful person.
- “The good news is that you can learn to be engaged. But only if you want to and are willing to put in the effort. *Image-management* is the tag we use to describe how to learn this way of interacting in the world in a positive, participatory way. By *image-management*, we mean that you have a lot of power over how people see you. You can change your mindset, attitudes and behaviors so that others see you as someone who is physically and mentally engaged. That image is going to look and feel differently than the way you are with your best friends when no adults are around. But there are many ways to demonstrate that you are taking things seriously and many students create new ways.

TWO BIG Points that we want *T/C* students to get:

- A) Unlike a typical classroom relationship in which a teacher goes out of her way to pay attention to each student equally, we take a real-world approach; respect is earned. We make sure that students know that we do not think negatively of them if they do not want to engage with the classroom community. But when a person is not engaged, others will make decisions about how or even if they want to be engaged with them. There are lots of ways—not just a White way-- to manage one's image that works in the real world. But there are some attitudes that simply won't work because they are so blatantly disengaged that they make it easy for others to disregard all of the valuable characteristics that a person may have to offer the world.
- B) How one physically presents oneself shapes how others think of one's mental abilities. If a person projects an attitude of reticence and distraction, it is easy—and researchers now tell us-- it is also almost instinctual for others to perceive a mental disengagement that may indicate a lack of seriousness that may not actually exist. By physically managing one's image one can often convince oneself to be engaged as well. For example, there are studies that say if one acts happy, sometimes, that action may help one to become happy.