

Teaching Tip
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Note Taking

Teaching Tips is written by Dan Madigan (The Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology). If you have a teaching tip to share or if you would like to comment on any of the teaching tips, please write to Dan Madigan at dmadiga@bgsu.edu.

Student Note Taking

I often hear faculty say that they are frustrated when student balk at taking notes in class. "Isn't note taking part of being a student," faculty ask? "If so, then why do some students insist that faculty provide all the notes for a lecture? The answer to the questions can be complicated if only because the learning environment for students has been changing over the years. One thing is becoming pretty clear about student resistance to note taking. If the students think that they will be tested on the notes, they want to make sure they have all the answers. This sounds fair. For example, if everything they need to know for a test will be in the Powerpoint presentation, then they can't see why the presentation can't be made available. And while we are considering making those slides from our lecture available you might also be prepared for the comments "...Even before the actual presentation please!" What's a faculty member to do?

There are a lot of issues to sort through here that get thrown into to mix of the issue regarding note taking. In this one teaching tip we can't possibly cover the interesting and complex topic of whether, for example, we should or should not use Powerpoint to present our lectures...or whether faculty should provide a full set of lecturer's notes to students. A more thorough reading of the topics needs to be made available. So, for a more complete discussion about this topic, I invite you to read the attached PDF file that was provided to me recently by the CRLT at the University of Michigan. In the document, the authors make a solid case for student note taking-under certain conditions. For example, student do benefit from note taking. (Bligh, 2000) In fact, one could easily argue that students who take notes are involved in the process of active learning-which we know has a lot of support in the higher education arena. Conversely, however, this document points out that some researchers make the argument

that providing lecturer notes to students can also be beneficial. (Kiewra, 1985)

As I said, the issue is a bit more complicated than we would like to think. For the students and us as faculty, the world and learning environment is changing. The most important thing to consider when discussing the merits of note taking is how it might contribute to student learning. If note taking comes down an issue that, for example, accurate notes are necessary in order to pass a test, then students might just resort to hiring someone else to take notes so that they have a better chance of doing well in the class. If, however, students are actually learning from the note taking process, then set up the learning environment that complements this process. At any rate, reflect on why you want students to take notes and then do all you can to support the process that you deem most important. For different perspectives on this topic, please refer to the attached document.

Teaching Tips is written by Dan Madigan, the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology at BGSU. Contact Dan Madigan dmadiga@bgnet.bgsu.edu if you have an idea for a tip or suggestions for this service.