

# SMC ETHICS

## Continuing a Dialogue on What We Do and How We Do It

### In Praise of Students

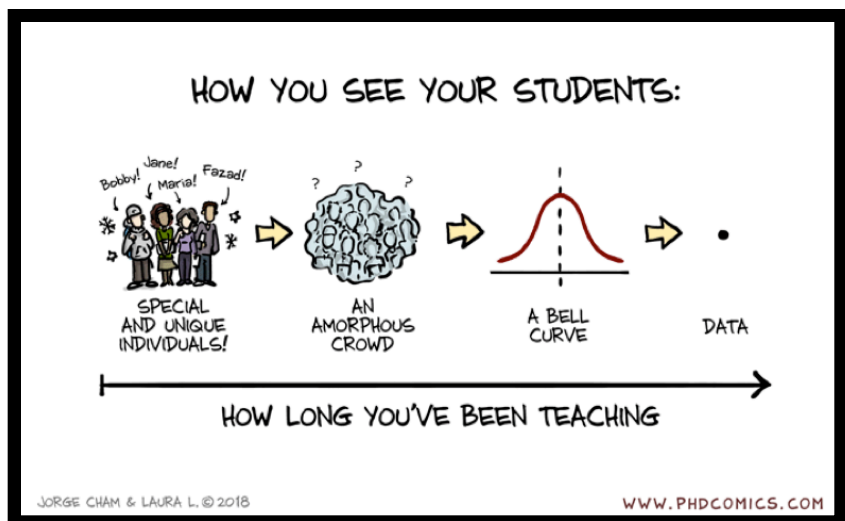
“Do I belong here? Am I good enough? Am I an imposter?”

Would it surprise you if your students were having this inner dialogue each time they attended class? Many of us have spent a large portion of our adult lives on a college campus, first as a student and now as faculty. We treat SMC as our second home, secure in the knowledge that we belong here. For our students from economic or racial/ethnic backgrounds that have been historically marginalized by higher learning, this many times is not the case. They may have a completely different experience of being in the college environment, and even might feel like intruders in a space that isn't meant for them.

Unfortunately, students' doubts about whether they belong in college or have the skills to succeed here can severely lower their chances of success.

“I applaud your effort! Way to go on that revision! I see so much progress in your work!”

As instructors, we have an obligation beyond teaching



## Mind the Equity Gap

The classroom clock clicks over to 8:10 am as one of your students enters your 8:00 am class late once again. You decide right then to righteously scold the student, either publicly on the spot or privately when a chance arises. Since your policy on being tardy was clearly outlined in your syllabus and reviewed at the start of the semester, you might even feel no compunction about strictly imposing a penalty—after all, the rules are the rules, aren't they?

Yet it might be better to pull back and honestly ask just how important this rule is or why it is necessary in the first place. And while doing so, it is perhaps just as important to ask how such a classroom policy, which might appear fair and essential, even one of the eternal, unquestionable features of the classroom, may disproportionately affect different populations of students. In other words, does this policy that appears to treat all students equally really create an

the content of our classes to help our students take ownership of the institution and gain confidence in their abilities. Too often we so focus on our students' errors and failings, of course with the good intention of correcting them, that we let their successes slide by without comment. One strategy we can choose is to replace messages about shortcomings with more positive ones. Recent research has shown just how much micro-affirmations—small gestures of caring, listening, and comfort—can make students feel welcome in an institution.

“Excellent discussion, you really dug into the material! I am so proud of you! You’ve got this!”

Going a step further, we can also make an effort to take class time to publicly recognize and praise students for their achievements, thereby affirming their intelligence and capability of succeeding in college. Though it requires an additional level of emotional and personal commitment, this kind of positive engagement is useful for improving the performance of all students, but especially of those historically underserved students we most need prioritize if we are to close our equity gaps.

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equitable outcome and best serve to produce success for all our students, who are so incredibly diverse in race and ethnicity, socioeconomic background, age, and gender identity?

When approached from this equity perspective, suddenly it may make a difference whether the bus your student took was late on its route, your student worked a graveyard shift the night before, or they simply couldn't find parking. A real conversation becomes possible that not only aims to find a way for the student to succeed in the class but also might demonstrate to the student your concern for them and recognition of the struggles they face.

An equity mindset of course goes beyond the syllabus and course policies to influence everything we do as instructors. The good news is that choices faculty make to address equity gaps can benefit all students. Selecting a low cost or no cost OER textbook allows a student who previously had to choose between buying a textbook vs buying groceries to now have access to a tool for educational success. Choosing materials that show how diverse individuals have shaped your discipline allows all students to see their potential to change the field. Captioning videos not only makes content accessible to deaf students but also serves as a useful learning aid to improve comprehension for all students, especially those with language barriers. Providing study guides and lecture notes helps first time college attendees to organize their learning and clearly conveys a professor's expectations for all students.

As faculty, our face-to-face and online weekly interactions with our students provide us with the opportunity and privilege to affect student outcomes and erase many of the barriers keeping our students from success. Our colleagues both within and across departments can be a resource on what is working, and as we move further into Guided Pathways redesign we should see each meeting as an opportunity to have important conversations about equity. But most importantly, in our mission to provide equitable education to our students we must remember each student is more than a data point.

For those looking for more on equity in the classroom and curriculum, the [SMC Faculty Equity Resource Guide](#) is a fantastic resource.