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Humor in the Classroom: **4 Ways to Engage Even If You're Not Funny**

by Andy Masters

Each year, every faculty member becomes one year older. However, the average age of each incoming student remains the same. This presents a challenge: *How can we keep the communication and learning gap from expanding more and more as time goes on?*

The reality is this: We've now graduated from the MTV Generation to the A.D.D. Generation. This generation has been granted endless satellite channels, websites, text messages, and Ipod music choices to constantly zap through daily. This makes it more difficult than ever before for faculty to keep the interest and attention of the daydreaming student.

Alas, here are a few great tips for faculty to incorporate humor to better engage today's generation of students (even if you don't think you're that funny):

1. "Utilize Visual Enhancers"

You can easily locate funny jokes, cartoons, blogs, and pictures relating to your field or subject through using Google and Google Images. Simply search under keywords such as "*biology humor*," "*accounting jokes*," or "*funny marketing*", and you can stockpile weeks of material at your fingertips. This same search can also be used for YouTube video clips, which has seemingly captured every funny moment in the history of mankind (*or, at least, their mankind*).

Sound like time-consuming research?

Take advantage of the "*Google Alerts*" tool to flag such keywords, allowing you to receive email notifications when new cartoons, articles, or videos are posted on such phrases. Let the Internet do the work for you, and you can be credited with igniting a fresh, fun learning environment students will look forward to.

2. "Keep Your Eyes Open"

Keep an eye out for comical scenes from movies or TV, which might have some direct or even indirect relevance to your field or subject. Did you see something hysterical on Jay Leno's "*Headlines*" segment, but didn't have your TIVO running? Simply visit www.nbc.com the next morning, where you can retrieve and share any such headlines from previous episodes.

Also, be sure to reference the sarcastic hit book "Non Campus Mentis: World History According to College Students" by Professor Anders Henriksson for immediate classroom comic relief. Always be on the lookout for books and resources on humor in the classroom to sharpen your skills in your craft.

Opportunities for humor present themselves throughout each day. Be prepared to capitalize at any time, as you just might present such humor at the exact moment a stressed-out student needs it most.

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3. *“Provide an Environment for Students to Share Humor”*

When applicable and appropriate, allow an environment where students are encouraged to have fun in group projects or class exercises together. No one can articulate cool and funny lingo to students better than other students. *“Make learning fun”* is one principle which holds true no matter the generation. Teaching can be much easier when students *look forward* to coming to class.

One professor allowed each student the opportunity to create a funny/creative image at the beginning of each class to introduce that day’s topic. The students embraced the challenge whole-heartedly, and amused each other to a level which even became competitive! The class was so enthralled, this professor noted that class attendance was considerably higher than the previous semester, and tardiness became virtually non-existent.

Other professors enjoy the world of practical jokes--just use very good judgment that the recipient will be a very good sport! As with other humor attempts, always try to make the humor relevant to the subject or the learning process.

4. *“With Humor, Timing is Everything”*

Specifically, some faculty believe in strategically placing a humorous visual aid as a *“commercial break,”* used as either a segue between chapters, during a particularly mundane topic, or when the eyes begin to “glaze-over” in the middle of a long lecture. Other faculty prefer to begin class with a humorous find, or end class on a good note. There is no golden rule—whichever you might be more comfortable with, or might receive the best response.

Zig Ziglar, one of the most successful motivational speakers in history, knew the power of incorporating humor in his presentations. Throughout his career, Zig would strategically place some type of wit, joke, or funny example every seven minutes during his presentation, no matter the audience or topic. As he studied, attention span begins to dip as time between jokes lingered. People pay attention because they don’t want to miss the next joke!

Certainly, seven minutes is a daunting task—if not downright inappropriate for education. However, there is an understanding about the human attention span which can be garnered from Zig. Most importantly, though, faculty members should challenge themselves to incorporate *at least one* humorous attempt per class session. *Anything.*

Why are these effective teaching tools?

Certainly, the job of an educator isn’t to entertain. It is to educate. However, separate academic studies from Iowa State University, Bowling Green University, and Johns Hopkins University each determined that incorporating humor in the classroom improves student retention, interest in the subject, faculty ratings, and even class attendance.

Scientifically, laughter helps the human body produce endorphins, which relieve pain and induce euphoria. Both can come in handy during a stressful semester for a student.

Besides: *Do you remember a teacher who didn’t just teach a class, but impacted your life? Did you feel as if they could relate to you, and could even make you laugh? Did you have fun in their class, and look forward to attending each day?*

We would all love to create this impact.

*******FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*******

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As with anything else, these tips may not work every time, but give them a shot.

Students will want to attend your class, pay more attention in your class, and be more inclined to engage in interactive discussion if an environment of humor exists. Students can sense which faculty members are “*going through the motions*”, and have taught the same course the same way for 20 years. Students can also sense who enjoys their job, and who wants to interact with students.

Indeed, you just might make teaching more fun, interesting, and enjoyable for yourself, as well. You’ll be amazed how much *you* will look forward to going to class when you have something great to share.

About the Author: Andy Masters has presented hundreds of entertaining and inspirational programs for Faculty, Staff, and Students across North America. He has written 4 books and earned 4 degrees, including an M.A.-Human Resources Development and an M.A.-Marketing from Webster University. Andy is a member of the National Speakers Association (NSA), the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH), and numerous educational associations. Visit www.andy-masters.com or email andy@andy-masters.com for book information or speaking availability.

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