



TEACHING TIPS OF THE MONTH FROM MC FACULTY



Brought to you by TIDES and PALS January 2016

The Faculty Program for Active Learning in STEM (GTSTEP/PALS) (www.montgomerycollege.edu/gtstep), the Teaching to Increase Diversity and Equity in STEM (TIDES - <http://cms.montgomerycollege.edu/TIDES/>) grant project, and ELITE (<http://cms.montgomerycollege.edu/elite/>) are happy to bring you the "Student Engagement Tips of the Month". Both PALS (with its focus on active learning in STEM) and TIDES (with its focus on active learning and culturally sensitive pedagogy) seek to incorporate highly engaging learning activities for diverse student populations into STEM courses. However, as you will see, many of these activities are not STEM-specific and can be applied to any course. We also welcome your general feedback about this publication, which you can send to tides@montgomerycollege.edu.

Theme: Start of Semester Ice Breakers

Tip 1: Sharing Characteristics and Making Commitments

Goals: To establish commonalities among students and to promote commitment to preparedness

Description: Have students stand up and leave their desks. Identify one corner of the room as the "YES" corner and another as the "NO" corner. You can also establish a "SOMETIMES/MAYBE" corner if you wish. Ask students about 8-10 yes/no questions. Students answer the questions by moving to the appropriate corner. The questions can be about students' lives outside the classroom (ex. work/life/family responsibilities, use of social media, aspirations, hobbies, backgrounds, etc.) or anything else you feel would be interesting and appropriate. In addition, I always ask the question: *Who will commit to coming to every class prepared and on time (barring illness or crisis)?* For the students who move to the YES corner, acknowledge their commitment and its importance to their success. For the students who do not move to the YES corner, ask what it would take to get them there. Sometimes after a little discussion, students are willing to commit themselves. Even if they are not, they usually walk away with a better understanding of course expectations, requirements of success, and their own priorities and practical challenges.

Strengths: Explicitly asking for a commitment to preparedness may coax some students outside of their comfort zones.

Challenges: The above mentioned strength could be a challenge.

Time: approximately 15-20 minutes

Submitted by: [Prof. Michael Berman](#)

Tip 2: The Things We Have in Common

Goals: To build rapport with classmates and identify common interests

Description: On 4-5 sheets of paper, each a different color, draw or print 5-6 different shapes on each sheet and cut them out. On the 1st day of class, randomly assign each student a shape. Ask students to assemble in groups with those who have the same *color*. Members of each group must ask each other questions until they identify 1-2 interesting or unusual things that everyone in the group has in common. Once all groups are done, you can have students share with the whole class. Next, have students reassemble in groups with those who have the same *shape* and repeat the questioning process.

Strengths: Students practice creative thinking when trying to identify something interesting or unusual. Also, the instructor could consider the "data" students share when designing assignments or use it to connect to course concepts.

Challenges: Sometimes students struggle to find commonalities beyond the obvious. When this happens, I ask prompting questions such as "I hear that all of you have cars and drive to campus, but what about your driving preferences?"

Time: Time will vary based on group sizes. I recommend 2-3 minutes for each round, but I have used more time if all groups are engaged.

Submitted by: [Dr. Angela Lanier](#)

