Conferencing: A Valuable Assessment Tool

Sometimes, it may appear that we have students who are problems. Rarely is this the case. More so, many of our students have problems and learning challenges. Conferencing can help students express their learning difficulties.

What is conferencing?

In this case, conferencing refers to one-on-one student and faculty communication to discuss a current or recent assignment. The ultimate goal is to help the student and the entire classroom of students to improve.

Why does conferencing work?

It’s an opportunity to discuss assignment expectations and how well the student is doing in meeting these. The student is helped to see the progressive learning nature of the course, ask questions in a dignified private manner and realize the instructor is interested in the student’s success.

What are some benefits of conferencing?

Conferencing dignifies the students and facilitates learning:

- Giving the student personalized instruction to improve
- Reinforcing what the student is doing well
- Allowing the student to see and correct his own errors
- Providing students who are not conferencing time for practice, research, reading and correction
- Helping the instructor better understand the root cause of student learning challenges and respond by:
  - Providing more practice and examples
  - Providing additional handouts and online references
  - Directing a student to learning assistance if needed

How to conference with students?

Select an assignment – it may be a current work or an assignment in progress to discuss and help the student improve.

Set aside instruction time and make yourself available during scheduled class time to meet with all students – be careful not to meet only with students who have more difficulties than others and be mindful not to let a few students monopolize the time.

As you conference with the student, sit side-by-side.

Ask the student, “Is there something specific that you need help doing or understanding?”

Focus the conference on the student’s response to his specific need or a need you have isolated for this particular student.

End every conference by giving the student something to try and keep notes. Look for student improvement in the future.

While meeting with individuals, give the other students something meaningful to do.

A tip to effectively use the time devoted to conferences:

Before meeting with each student, have the student write down the one specific question he has and highlight the area of his assignment that corresponds to his question.