

# HANDSHAKES & HELLOS

## Using a Brief Introductory Meeting Assignment to Improve Perceptions of Teacher Immediacy

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### INTRODUCTION

Relationship development at the course level, particularly at the beginning, is critical to the success of the course and its students (Felder & Brent, 2016).

Displaying verbal and nonverbal teacher immediacy behaviors can shorten the distance between student and instructor, helping to increase student motivation and engagement (Carrell & Menzel, 2001; Estep, 2012; King & Witt, 2009).

In an attempt to connect with as many of the 94 students as possible, those enrolled in a non-major agricultural communications course at Texas Tech University were assigned a questionnaire and meeting with the instructor.

### HOW IT WORKS

Students were assigned an activity for a small amount of pass/fail credit requiring they complete a questionnaire, then find a time to meet the instructor to submit and briefly discuss it. Students had two weeks at the beginning of the semester to complete the assignment. The questions were:

- First and last name
- Year, major and minor (if applicable)
- Where are you from?
- What is your favorite TV show(s) and/or movie(s)?
- Do you work? If so, where? How many hours each week, on average?
- How can I best help you be successful in this class?
- What is something I should know about you?

### RESULTS TO DATE

Student responses were used to tailor examples used during class lectures, as well as to put students into teams for group work assignments. Responses made the instructor aware of any special circumstances held by students, making her better able to address issues as they arose.

When surveyed about the assignment, 77 of the 80 respondents reacted positively. See key themes described in the main panel.

### ADVICE TO OTHERS

Planning time immediately before or after class as well as maintaining office hours reduces the number of meetings to schedule.

Meeting immediately after class was the most popular time for meeting, so announce availability to students after each class session.

### COSTS & RESOURCES NEEDED

This activity can be executed at no cost to the instructor or students.

### REFERENCES

- Carrell, L. J. & Menzel, K. E. (2001). Variations in learning, motivation, and perceived immediacy between live and distance education classrooms. *Communication Education*, 50(3), 230-240.
- Estep, C. M. (2012). *The relationships among teacher immediacy, professor/student rapport and self-regulated learning*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1369521940)
- Felder, R. M., & Brent, R. (2016). *Teaching and learning in STEM*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- King, P. & Witt, P. (2009). Teacher immediacy, confidence testing, and the measurement of cognitive learning. *Communication Education*, 58(1), 110-123.

## APPROACHABILITY

“It made it easier to consult [instructor] for future assignments because we had already met.”

“Minimized intimidation of a large classroom setting.”

“Created a safe space to ask any questions or elaborate on concerns.”

*Student responses to Handshakes & Hellos assignment*

## CONNECTION

“Gave a personal connection with the teacher and helped encourage a one-on-one relationship down the road.”

“It made it seem like I wasn’t just a number in a class and actually a person to my professor.”

## CARING

“A sense that the teacher cared and respected the students.”

“It showed me that she cared for us and wanted to get to know us.”

“It made me feel important, and as if my presence in the class truly mattered.”



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