

Why Not Get Your Master's Degree Now?

When it's this easy, you'll want take the leap! Here are the reasons why. You receive a Stony Brook University degree without the hassle of commuting or campus parking. Classes follow teachers' calendars rather than the campus calendar, and honors local school vacations. Classes are closer to your workplace. The cohort will be together throughout the program, leading to professional collaboration and cross-district communication. Currently, a three-credit course costs \$725, which is a substantial savings over on-campus costs. Classes are scheduled to begin in January, 2008.

Two programs will be offered, both for 33 credits.

- Master of Arts of Liberal Studies with a concentration (not a certification) in Special Education Inclusion will meet on Wednesdays at the Suffolk's Edge Teacher Center in Wheatley Heights.
- Master of Arts of Liberal Studies with a concentration (not a certification) in Literacy will meet on Tuesdays at the Commack Teacher Center in Commack.

And there are even more reasons to register! Every attempt will be made to have the concentration courses that take place at the Teacher Center meet on the same day of the week for the entire program. The Liberal Arts courses are scheduled to be on-line courses. Call the Teacher Center today at 631-254-0107 to discuss your plans and/or to register.

Using the Power of Choice to Increase Student Responsibility

"Your classroom is an ongoing lab in learning how to make choices. It can be a lab where children learn obedience or one where they are issued continuous invitations to accept responsibility. The choice is yours."

— Chick Moorman, educator and author

For students to develop into responsible adults, they must learn to act on their values, to cope with pressures, and to trust their own judgment. These are all facets of the healthy self-esteem we would like our students to exhibit. As a teacher, you are aware of the role you play in helping each and every student grow. Much of a student's success in learning and functioning in the school community depends upon a positive sense of self.

What can you do to advance the self-esteem and maturity of your students? Giving them opportunities to exercise choice will help your students increase their personal responsibility. Through making choices, students learn to exercise control and to participate in self-management.

Begin by offering your students varying degrees of choice. As they gain daily experience in making choices, expand the possibilities. The following methods will help you use the power of choice in your classroom.

Provide decision-making opportunities. Each decision a student makes builds his/her sense of personal power and responsibility. Here are some examples:

1. For language arts, place three pictures on the chalkboard and have students choose to write about one.
2. Make a math assignment that gives students the choice to complete the odd-numbered or even-numbered problems.
3. List what needs to be included in a history report, and allow students to choose the topics.

4. Assign a science project that allows students to choose one of three different topics.
5. Give students several choices for how to make up work missed while absent.
6. Let students do a demonstration speech on a subject of their choice.
7. Give students the choice to mind map or outline a chapter.
8. Ask students to interview a person of their own choice.
9. Allow cooperative groups to choose to perform a skit, write a commercial, or create an advertisement to demonstrate their learning.

Help students personalize their choices. When and where do students make choices in their lives? How do they feel about them? What meaning does making decisions have for them? Create tasks (written or oral) that help

Using the Power of Choice (continued)

students explore their personal reactions to decision making. Include any of the following:

1. List five things that you were able to decide this week. Put them in order of their importance to you.
2. Make a list of five things that other people decided for you that you would have liked to decide for yourself. Put them in order of their importance to you.
3. Are there some things you wish you did not have to decide? List them. Pick one and write your reasons for not wanting to make such a decision.
4. What decisions do you get to make at home? List five. What other decisions would you like to make at home? List five. Why do you think you should be allowed to make these decisions? Write your reasons.
5. Write a letter of thanks to someone who gave you an opportunity to make choices.

Use "Freedom Phrases" to let students make decisions. Many times throughout the day, students ask questions that place you in the role of decision maker. They ask

questions such as: "Will this book qualify for extra credit?" "Is it okay if I ask Janet to help me?"

With a simple yes or no, you can answer these common questions quickly or you can use them as opportunities to empower students. If you use a Freedom Phrase such as "you decide," you can effectively place decision-making responsibilities on students.

Use a Freedom Phrase only when your answer to a student's question would be "yes." If it is not okay for the student to ask Janet for help, simply say no. If you feel strongly about the issue, this is not a time to let students decide.

Other Freedom Phrases that work well:

"It is up to you."

"It is your choice."

"You choose."

"I am comfortable with whatever you decide."

Regardless of the phrase you choose, the message to students is one of respect. You are telling them, "I trust your judgment. You are capable of making many of your own decisions. You know what is best for you and for our class." (*excerpted from Performance Learning Plus monthly e-newsletter — April, 2007*)

Technology Update: 3 Things You Should Know About Wikis

The word "wiki" is not an acronym but rather (according to Ward Cunningham at Microsoft Corporation, who coined the term) "a Hawaiian word used as a substitute for quick, to avoid naming the software quick-Web."

What Are They? Wikis are web pages that can be viewed and modified by anybody with a Web browser and access to the Internet. This means that any visitor to the wiki can change its content if they desire. While the potential for mischief exists, wikis can be surprisingly vigorous, open-ended, collaborative group sites. They are variously described as discussion mediums, information repositories, mail systems, and tools for collaboration. Wikis provide users with both author and editor privileges; the overall organization of contributions can be edited as well as the content itself. Wikis can incorporate sounds, movies, pictures and multimedia presentations. Allowing everyday users to create and edit any page in a web site encourages democratic use of the Web. The results of the users' actions on the content of the site are instantly visible to other users.

How Do They Work? All it takes is a connection to the Internet and a Web browser. When you click on a wiki page's **Edit** link, the raw text file is sent to your browser in an editable form, allowing you to modify the content of the page. Pressing the **Save** button sends the modified text back to the

wiki server, which replaces the existing text file with your changed version for all to see. When you request a wiki page, the corresponding text file along with user changes is inserted into a page template and sent to your browser.

How Can Wikis Be Used In My School? Because wikis grow and evolve as a direct result of people adding material to the site, they can address a variety of pedagogical needs—student involvement, group activities, and so on. Since wikis exist on the Internet, students can access and participate from any location, provided they have Internet access. Wikis allow faculty and students to engage in collaborative projects that might not be possible in a classroom. Collaborative projects help promote "pride of authorship" and ownership. Wikis can show the evolution of thought processes as students interact with the site and its contents. In addition, wikis are being used as e-portfolios, demonstrating their usefulness as a tool for collection and reflection.

Collaboration using a wiki is not limited to students. Faculty can use wikis to collaborate on projects, whether planning a shared lesson or unit, preparing a reading list or designing a school-wide event such as a Career Fair. The possibilities for using wikis as the platform for collaborative projects are limited only by one's time and imagination. You can create a public wiki or one open to invited users only.

Would you like to start a wiki? Try the website below. "At PBwiki you can make a free wiki as easily as a peanut butter sandwich." It's simple! <http://pbwiki.com/>

NYS Teacher Center Online Academy

Courses open to all can be found at the Rockland Teacher Center website at www.rockteach.org. Click on Online Courses, then Online Academy Catalog and follow the directions. Be sure to check with your district for course approval.

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