

SPIN presentation: Checking in: a mental health positive tool for student engagement (15 minutes)

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- Check in has been a key component of my work outside of PSU for well over a decade, been using it here for 3 years in all of my courses (from a few students, to courses of 28 students)

What is check in? An opportunity at the start of class for each student to speak, as a means of inviting students to be present in your class.

Set up (How I introduce it to students)

- What you need to say to be present/access needs (students can also be encouraged to share these privately if they are more comfortable with that)
 - Modeling (giving examples—provided on back)
- How you feel (emotional intelligence)
 - Gen ed students often skip this—and that's ok, its an invitation rather than a prescription
- Wildcard prompt

How to facilitate check in:

- Share the prompt(s) and remind students they don't need to remember the prompts
- Invite a student to volunteer to start off; the student who started to pass to the next student
- Remind students they don't have to be original (they can share the same thing someone else shared)

Highlight:

- Polyvagal/trauma informed teaching connection
 - Learning happens when students feel safe
- Shortcut to building classroom community
 - What it does for introverts
- Modifications for large or online courses (to your neighbor, in the chat)
- Reinforcement (mirror exercise at the end of class); I reinforce...(and the students say something they want to take away from the class)
- Sheet of prompts on back
 - Access need examples
 - Check in prompt examples:
 - Curricular
 - Calendar
 - Wildcard/fun

Other thoughts:

- You do not need to respond to student's check ins
- Covers the beginning of class/first five minutes when students are still arriving (I have a five minute grace period before being tardy affects their grade)
- Students can pass, or participate in check in at whatever level they are comfortable
- Remind students (as necessary) that they don't need to elaborate or justify what they share
- Time 'lost' to check in, is gained in vibrancy and engagement of classroom community

- I try to phrase the questions so that they are open to interpretation and as inclusive as possible to students with different backgrounds and diverse experiences
 - i.e. I ask about a favorite holiday traditions vs. what are you doing for Christmas
 - I.e. I ask about an epic adventure you've had vs. what's the farthest place you've traveled

Access need examples: I usually give one or two examples the first few weeks of classes to build students understanding of what an access need is; I also repeat the language that 'we all have access needs that shift from day to day' and if a student doesn't have an access need they can skip to the next prompt or say something to the effect of 'I don't have any access needs today'.

- I need to leave class ten minutes early to meet with my advisor
- I have a migraine, so I am listening, but I need to put my head down during class
- I need to eat my lunch during class
- I need to get out of my desk and stand every few minutes
- I need to sit on the floor today
- While we are working on our projects, I would like to listen to music in my headphones
- My daughter's school had a snow day, so we have a special guest in class today
- I am waiting for a call back from the doctor's office so my ringer is on and I may need to step out for a minute
- I need to go fill my water bottle, is this a good time?

List of prompts by type (non-exhaustive—there are many, many more)

Curricular/Class-related

- What's a favorite assignment you've had? (right before a unit about project-based learning)
- What unit/topic/module are you most looking forward to learning about this semester?
- What has been your biggest delight OR surprise in this course?
- Which Habit of Mind have you grown the most in this semester?

Calendar

- What is a favorite candy you have? (near Halloween)
- What is a thought or feeling you have about grading? (near six week grades)
- What is your favorite snow day activity?
- What are you most looking forward to over break?

Wildcard/fun

- If you could have a super power, which would you choose?
- What is your ideal breakfast?
- What was your favorite class in High School?
- What color vibes with how you are feeling today?
- What was a favorite childhood toy or activity?
- Describe how you are feeling today as a type of weather
- What is a show that entertains you?
- What is a game you like to play? (could be a sport, video game, board game, etc.)

Reinforcement--sharing one thing you'll take away from the lesson, using the format: 'I reinforce...'

Can be something big or small, another person, a fun moment, something someone has already said, an assignment that's due next class you want to remember, etc.