

I realized after a term here that most students are unaware of many of LCC's resources, and are stretched so thin (and are so culturally unprepared) that they will simply miss out. Again. I started treating my 115 and 121 classes as a "homeroom" because those classes are a portal through which everyone passes. Early in the term, I give them a packet with phone numbers/hours/location and tell them about TRIO, the various tutoring centers, computer labs, health center, academic advising, the career center, the multicultural center, English conversational partners, and anything else that has crossed my radar. I give extra credit if they visit one of these and write a paragraph or two about their experience. Also, their challenges are so often rooted in class issues that I usually devote lecture/discussion time early in the term to air that out. I tell them that I came from a working class family that did not sit around the dinner table discussing poetry and Shakespeare; I was on my own as far as school and homework went, and was the first in my family to go to college. I tell them that if they were not raised in an educationally/intellectually privileged family, they will naturally not be equipped with the vocabulary, in language or concepts, that academia values. I tell them educated people recognize each other by the words, ideas, and names they flash like gang hand signals. I tell them if they want to succeed in college, they need to think of it as a bilingual, cross-cultural experience, and to do the same thing that works there: immersion. I tell them they need to take advantage of every resource available, and that LCC is a wonderful place in that regard. I tell them that they can think just as well as anybody else, and that their life experience usually equips them to think better about a lot of issues than privileged students who have been sheltered from the world most of us live in. That speech tends to relieve them, because they realize that it's not about who they are, or whether they're smart enough, or whether they have what it takes. It's about learning a different culture--and put in those terms, they think: hey, I can do that. I find that that approach brings them out of fear and isolation, gets them talking together, and helps them take risks in their writing.

Other things I've tried: I like the science teachers' scavenger hunt, and do a similar thing with a different application. I always have my 115 students do a scavenger hunt in their text book (I use *Between Worlds*) as an exercise in how to approach any text in an efficient way. I remember how a friend of mine who was always told she was dumb, thought she had to memorize her textbook when she finally got into nursing school at forty something--and did, all 400 pages! It took her a year of twelve-hour days, seven days a week--that's the only way she knew to study. So I have them figure out how to find a variety of things in the text, because many of them really don't even know what an index is, or how to quickly see what a book is about and for. That particular text lends itself to the exercise, because it's a reader, rhetoric and handbook combined--I can have them find out what a comma splice is (hence, they discover there's a whole section on common grammatical errors), and where the sample essay in MLA style is (hence they at least know there is such a thing), etc. I find that classroom time devoted to such an exercise really pays off. Left to their own devices, and crunched for time as most students are, they will only do whatever is required to finish a particular assignment and can spend a whole term with a text without knowing it has answers to their questions. One hour of class time changes that.

I also always do one class in the library and take advantage of the wonderful Juanita Benedicto, who exposes them to research tools and strategies that have broad applications in many classes besides mine.

I include the course outcomes in the syllabus, and have students self-assess at the start of the term and midway through: on a scale of 1-5, with five being "I know what this is and I can do it," and one being "I never even heard of this!"

I use WebCT even in my face-to-face classes, and try to schedule them in the computer lab, so that students have some exposure to IT and can gain confidence if it's new to them. WebCT also lets me put up resources, such as grammar exercises, to which I can send individual students, so it helps me teach across the wide range of ability that I see (to my surprise) in 121. (Just as an aside, I really think there are some holes in the testing process that need to be filled!)

For writing confidence, in particular, I usually do a class anthology and find that this group publication project really gets students invested in their own work, and each other's, as they go through draft workshops together and then get to see what the revised results are. I always let students choose their own topics, within a certain essay form, and encourage them to leverage their writing when possible. For example, for their research essay in 121, I tell them they can research some aspect of the career they're thinking about; often, students research a medical condition they or their children have, or how to deal with landlord/tenant disputes (I had an asthmatic student with a serious mold problem in her apartment that the landlord refused to fix). Topic choice is a way to get them more involved in their writing, and also to show them that their ideas and voices can make a real difference--often, essays in the anthology are very helpful to other students who are dealing with similar situations. I'm thinking of an extremely bright student who wrote about having an anxiety disorder; I happened to know that there were three other students in the class who were severely affected by anxiety, but closeted. Another student wrote a research paper about what it takes to get into the nursing program at LCC--a goal of several students in that particular class, and not an easy thing to understand, because there are so many hurdles and complexities; everyone wanted a copy of that paper!

That's the list of what I've found helpful, off the top of my head.