Stop Wasting Your Time and Help Students Overcome Their Resistance to Office Hours

Every week instructors set aside time to sit in their office and wait for students to come discuss questions or concerns. If you are like me, you are shocked when students actually show up and want to talk. Why do students resist going to office hours? Why are they afraid to make use of this resource--our time and knowledge--that universities require us to offer? These two quick changes can help make all the difference.

Many students, often first-generation or minority students in particular, don’t understand the purpose of office hours. Some find the term “office hours” misleading and interpret it as time when we are working on our own projects. They don’t realize that we set aside that time for them. A solution to this is to consider rebranding “office hours” as student or visiting hours, which can send an inviting signal.

Once students realize that office hours are meant for their benefit, provide them with some examples of how to use the time effectively. Let students know that office hours are an ideal opportunity to ask questions about assignments, clarify course content, discuss their future professional or academic goals, etc. Encouraging students to use office hours will increase their chances of succeeding in the course and prevent you from waiting for students who never show.

Submitted by:
Katie Pearson, Doctoral Candidate, Theatre
Co-chair of the Diversity & Inclusion in Research & Teaching Organization (DIRECTO)
Associate for the Program for Instructional Excellence (PIE)
Florida State University

*Teaching tip inspiration from Kate Hill, a doctoral candidate in Biological Sciences at Florida State University, a PIE Associate, and DIRECTO co-chair.

“Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.”
—ALBERT EINSTEIN