

Faculty Matter Tip #29

Helping students pull things together: Writing a letter to a future student

One of the themes running through many of our Faculty Matter Teaching Tips is the notion of setting up one's courses so as to enable students to be intentional about their approach to their academic work. The goal is to lead them to "engage" more thoughtfully and actively, to reflect constructively on challenges they encounter, and to "own" their academic trajectory.

As you set the stage for the end-of-semester push, it can be useful to include **opportunities for students to think about your course content overall, as well as what they have done to succeed in mastering it**. One activity that has been implemented by at least two SJSU colleagues I know of is to have **students write anonymous letters to hypothetical future students in the course**. Prompts might include the following – or other questions you think might be helpful:

- What, in a nutshell, was this course about?
- What was the most interesting part, for you (the letter-writer)? Why?
- What did you learn about yourself, from taking this course? (About you as a student? About your interests?)
- How might what you learned in this course apply, to your future studies or to your life outside of SJSU?
- What advice do you have for someone about to embark on this course? Be specific here – why have you selected these recommendations?

Both faculty members mentioned above have compiled the letters they have gathered over several semesters. They frequently **share them with students at the start of each semester**, to get the new cohorts off to an informed and inspired start.

You can read all previous tips on the [Faculty Matter Tips](#) page of the CFD website, and share your own thoughts and ideas on the [Provost's Academic Spotlight blog under the category "Faculty Matter"](#). **Please add your own strategies using the comment link** on the [Provost's Academic Spotlight blog under the category "Faculty Matter"](#).