EDUC-X158 Culture of College: Instilling Habits of Mind

X158 is a 3 credit hour class designed for students on academic probation. The rationale for developing this course is based on the observation that it is often students’ personal habits—and not their academic abilities—that determine their success or failure in college classes. We emphasize to students that while several factors may have contributed to their past academic difficulties, they have met the basic admission requirements of Indiana University East, and thus are capable of successfully completing their chosen degree programs. The course provides students with a set of behaviors to help them succeed in areas that may have challenged them in the past.

X158 is structured around Costa’s and Kallick’s sixteen Habits of Mind (HOM), habits of thought and action that “can help students manage uncertain or difficult situations in college and in life. These habits can help them take thoughtful and intelligent action when there is no known solution to a problem (http://www.instituteforhabitsofmind.com/resources/pdf/16HOM.pdf).” Researchers from a variety of disciplines—philosophy, education, psychology, and the arts—have studied effective, skillful problem-solvers and decision makers from many walks of life and have identified the following common habits of successful people:

- persisting
- managing impulsivity
- thinking flexibly
- thinking about thinking (metacognition)
- striving for accuracy and precision
- questioning and posing problems
- learning continuously
- listening to others with understanding and empathy
- thinking and communicating with clarity and precision
- gathering data through all senses
- creating, imagining, and innovating
- responding with wonderment and awe
- taking responsible risks
- finding humor
- thinking interdependently

The course learning objectives of helping students make positive changes in their choices and behaviors that reflect the Habits of Mind, reflect critically and evaluate their own actions are accomplished using the following:

- Habits for Success Portfolio: Students intentionally practice each habit as it is introduced and build their portfolios to show how they are thinking about it and/or noticing how others are or are not using the HOM. The portfolio has a section for each of the HOM; creativity is encouraged as students build the portfolio throughout the semester. Journal entries written in class become part of the portfolio as well as pictures, articles, quotes, drawings, cartoons, internet links, etc.

- Film clips, YouTube videos, Films: These are used extensively to illustrate the various HOM and spark discussions. Full length film The Rabbit Proof Fence is viewed in class and students write a paper about what HOM they observe.

- Required Meetings with Academic Advisors: Students meet with advisors every 2-3 weeks to discuss progress, challenges they are facing with the semester.

- Required Meetings with Instructor: Students meet with instructor one-on-one twice during the semester—once in the first two weeks to establish rapport, and around mid-terms to discuss goals, progress.

- Success Project: This project has both a written and an oral component. Students may choose to write a letter to someone they love, telling the person how he/she can create a successful life using the HOM; students may interview a successful person of their choice to discover what HOM this person exhibits as well as behaviors and beliefs that lead to his/her success; or students may research the life/accomplishments of a successful person of their choice, explaining what HOMs contributed to that person’s success. Students are required to take this 1000 word assignment to the Writing Lab to get feedback prior to submitting it, and they give a 10 minute oral presentation to the class on their projects.

- Textbook: Keys to Effective Learning: Study Skills and Habits for Success by Carter, Bishop & Kravits emphasizes habits of successful people and provides real-life examples and exercises for application of the HOM.

- “My Story” Speakers: Various faculty, staff and community members are invited to speak to the class very informally and tell their own stories of challenges and successes in their lives. Students take notes, making observations about what HOM they observe and ask questions of the speakers during a discussion period.

Because we have had such positive responses from students, we have created an online course—a modification of the course described above—for high school seniors.