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Hacking the Academy

Cohen, Dan , Scheinfeldt, Joseph T

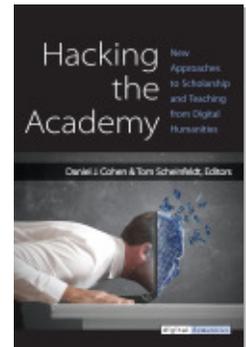
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Voices

CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT

Mills Kelly, David Doria, Rey Junco

Sometimes it seems to me that whenever things go wrong in college teaching, the first impulse of the professor is to blame the students. They aren't prepared for class. They don't want to grapple with the hard concepts. They don't want to read what I assign. They do all their work at the last minute. And now come laptops, smartphones, and other digital devices. We've all seen it. The student with a laptop who has clearly checked out of lecture. Is he reading his email? Is she chatting with a friend? Is he playing *World of Warcraft*? And then there are the other students peering covertly or openly at the open screen. I'm sorry to report that laptops aren't the problem, nor are students. Instead of blaming our students for wandering away on their laptops, it's time we looked a little more closely in the mirror and asked ourselves *why* they wander off. Let's take a step back and stop blaming our students—and their laptops. Doing so will force us to think more carefully about our own teaching practice and how we—as opposed to they—might improve.

—MILLS KELLY

It has always seemed extremely odd and unacceptable to many of us that faculty members of most universities, while being experts in their areas of research, have not received even a single hour of training on how to be an effective educator. In any other occupation, training is an intensely integral part of the job. Airplane pilots must log thousands and thousands of hours in simulators and in simple planes before they are allowed to fly commercial jets. There are even federal regulations to ensure that every airplane pilot is not only trained appropriately, but also can demonstrate that his training has resulted in him being an excellent pilot. However,

for arguably the most important job—educating the next generation—no one blinks an eye at the zero hours of training logged by the pilots of the classrooms.

—DAVID DORIA

Faculty need to be more like hackers. The old-school conceptualization of the classroom as a place to receive knowledge has outlived its usefulness. Society in general, and today's college students specifically, are more interested in participatory methodologies. Students are able to participate in their consumption of information from other sources, why not allow—better yet, encourage—them to participate in the consumption of academic information? Furthermore, most of today's college students have never known a time without the communications technologies that are blended into their lifestyles. There is evidence that high media users and multitaskers have different information-processing styles than low users. Ask any pilot and they will tell you that it is surprising how well humans can adapt to situations where we need to divide our attention between various tasks. There's an old pilot saying that "driving a car is like sleeping compared to flying." Now, imagine your students processing information like pilots. In a typical day they are connecting, consuming, and creating in the digital space paying attention to many things at once. Then, they walk into the college classroom where things move a lot slower and engagement demands are low (possibly near zero). Can we blame them for being disengaged?

—REY JUNCO