Getting students to take responsibility for their own work is a major component of building responsible learners. A psychological concept called “Locus of Control” helps explain why some students resist taking responsibility for their work and grades. “Locus of Control” relates to whether a person takes personal responsibility for what happens to her/him or attributes responsibility to forces outside his or her control. Theorists postulate that individuals basically fall into one of three categories: Internal or External-Other or External-Chance.

- **Individuals who believe that they control most of what happens to them** have an Internal Locus of Control. Successes are because of what they do and failures are because they missed something. “I got a C- because I did not study enough,” is a typical comment. Encourage an Internal Locus by asking them to analyze what they did right and what they missed after giving back a test, paper, or team assignment. Reinforce that they are in charge of effort.

- **Individuals who believe that what happens to them is because of what others do** have an External-Other Locus of Control. Their successes or failures are not based upon what they do. “Prof Hard gives brutal tests so I did poorly.” Counter this by having students at the end of a course write advice to future students about how to do well (give extra credit and they will gladly do this and remember no names on the pages you will provide future students).

- **Individuals who believe that what happens to them is because of chance** have an External-Chance Locus of Control. Their success or failure has little to do with what they do. “I lucked out this semester because my classes are all easy.” If you grade on a curve you
contribute to this because the particular students in a class are random. Counter with grading that is based upon rubrics that you share. If everyone does well, everyone does well.

✓ Fortunately, there is evidence that circumstances can affect a person’s Locus of Control. We can move students toward an Internal focus by continually showing them how to read assignments, think about them and come up with questions they have that will help them understand – and use those questions in class.

✓ Review everything you do from the lens of how it affects students with high External-Other or External-Chance orientations. Words count. Tell students they earn the grades they get – you don’t give grades, you only record them, good or bad. Remind them of the direct connection between solid study habits and grades. Check out Top 10 #5 and #19 for study tips.

✓ Reinforce that they are in charge of how they spend their time. Give course assignments well in advance. Tell them to look ahead, plan their time, look at major assignments in all their classes and plan accordingly. Remind them that they are in charge of the results.

✓ Reinforce good study habits with class activities that give them control. “Pop” quizzes, or “pop” writing assignments actually reinforce an External-Other or External-Chance orientation. Reward studying. Make the connection direct by doing predictable (not “easy”) activities that reward studying such as a regular 2 paragraph writing on “the 5 key points in the reading” or doing an exercise where they design a chart based upon part of the homework using only notes.

✓ Teach students how to prepare for your tests. Reinforce that they are in charge with specific study tips, talk about the amount of time to study, share past tests and good test answers. Show students how they can improve their grade by doing what you state.

✓ Assume students want to learn from their successes and mistakes. Give them a set of questions to answer to analyze why they got the grade they did on a test or major project/paper. Review it with them. This reinforces that THEY are responsible for their grade and that you believe they can increase their grade.
Teaching
A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty

The Top 10…

No. 1 – The All-Important First Day of Class
No. 2 – Ways to Make Your Teaching Life Easier
No. 3 – The Crucial Second and Third Classes
No. 4 – Ways to Show Students that You Respect Them
No. 5 – Promote Effective Student Study Skills
No. 6 – Components of a Well-Planned Class
No. 7 – Observe Your Teaching Tendencies
No. 8 – Ways to Keep Your Students Learning
No. 9 – Ways to Get Feedback on Teaching from Students
No. 10 – Using Short Writing to Assess Learning
No. 11 – Getting More (and Better) Student Questions
No. 12 – Mixing Things up Mid-Semester
No. 13 – Engaging Different Input Preferences
No. 14 – Helping Students Stay the Journey
No. 15 – Ways to End Your Course
No. 16 – Resources for Learning and Teaching
No. 17 – Create a Memorable AND Functional Syllabus
No. 18 – Ways to Build Your Students’ Self-Efficacy
No. 19 – Practical Study Tips to Share with Your Students
No. 20 – Laddering Thinking Skills
No. 21 – Learning Based Ways to End Lessons
No. 22 – Ways and Reasons to be Vulnerable While Teaching
No. 23 – Best Practices in Using Student Groups
No. 24 – Components of a Complete Learning Experience
No. 25 – Ways to Use Visuals for Learning

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