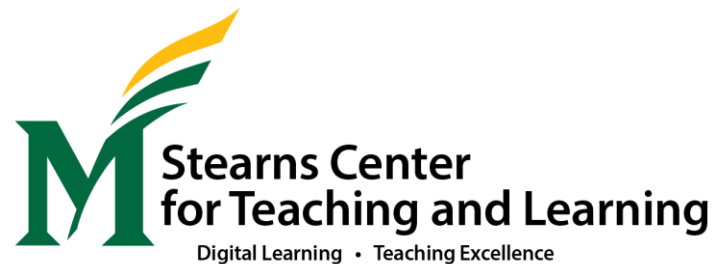


The “Why” Of Learning

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Over the years, I became particularly invested in motivating my students to explore “why” questions. I present every unit in the course by extensively explaining why it is important to examine this particular topic and how it builds on and relates to other concepts in the course. When students do not have a clear picture of why they are doing something, they run the risk of seeing activities and assignments as busy work, unimportant or irrelevant. This reduces the quality of their work and long term retention of the information. In addition to detailing why an activity or an assignment is useful and how it builds skills, I create discussion questions and design classroom activities that explore how the unit we are working on might be relevant to their own lives and/or the current political moments and cultural events. I motivate the students to think about and respond to questions like “why is it important to learn this” and “why are we doing this activity” so that they can come up with their individual connections between course material and the outside world. I deploy this strategy at the end of the semester as well. And ask my students to think about how the course might benefit them in their major concentrations and life beyond the university. I noticed a big positive change in student engagement and quality of work since I have started making a concerted effort in making this strategy the core of my instruction.



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