

## Real student/program balance- Back to School

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As an instructor I have seen the faces of students change over the years. Specifically, in radiology I have seen the demographic shift from students who are just coming out of school to a more diverse group. There is no “**average**” student type anymore. This can be hard to balance. Before teachers had to make sure that you planned for all the learning types (auditory, visual, etc.) but now you have to take into account different learners in different generations who are in different phases of their life. How are we doing these students justice? Are we setting real world expectations?

Students in radiology are required to complete a certain number of didactic courses, certain number of clinical hours, and a predetermined number of competencies that are mandatory before they can even think about taking the national registry examination. Many students come into a program and have no knowledge of what radiology is other than what they have seen on House or Grey’s Anatomy. Their first hard truth about radiology usually comes either at orientation or during the first semester. The ideology that radiology is easy, and all the hard work is done by the physician is extremely misleading and sets the student up for either (a) failure of the courses or (b) wasting everyone’s time because they withdraw. This further impacts a program because the college system and accreditation bodies want to know that students are being retained. How can programs balance retention and still maintain integrity to their field?

I have compiled a list of way I think we can better help students and maintain program integrity. These are just my observations on which you can feel free to expand, agree, or disagree, but we must start somewhere:

1. Student observation hours. I have worked at both places that require and do not require students to have a certain number of observation hours logged prior to applying to a program. I feel that the students who have logged hours have a much more real knowledge base of what radiologic technologists do. Students who have real expectations of what the job entails are less like to quit. They know what they signed up for as a future career.
2. Bring back the student interview. I know this is not a popular idea to most. We live a very PC/“sue happy” society. A person can scream discrimination for almost any reason. I am not saying that discrimination does not happen; unfortunately, it still does. However, only accepting students based on GPA’s and test scores cannot give an accurate description of whether or not that student will make it in the program. Sure, they will probably be able to do

the book work (great!) but can they talk to a patient? I have literally found myself having to teach today's student how to talk to people. It sounds absurd but true. Today's students have limited social skills due to the abundance of technology. Technology is not bad. I LOVE technology; but students today will talk like that text. IDC who you are in a professional world you cannot talk to patients like this (OMG!). Unfortunately, students today in all programs have mastered the art of looking good on paper but are missing necessary skills that can only be gauged in an interview.

3. Set realistic goals. Make the grade scale for your program match the grade scale for the ARRT national examination. Setting low expectations, such as only needing a 70 to pass the course, does nothing for the student. It may mean that you retain the student and therefore the program retention looks good. But if the student in your class is making the bare minimum to be advanced to the next course how do you expect them to make a 75 on the ARRT national examination? This sets the student up for failure. Isn't the goal to see them succeed? Don't have a student think they are rock stars for advancing through a program and then set them up only to be discouraged when it really matters. I know, from experience, sometimes these grade scales are set by the state, but lobby for better or find ways to incorporate higher grade expectations in the classroom. We live in a society where we consistently set the bar low, so everyone feels included and wins. Everyone searches for the least they can do to progress to the next level and in life. They unfortunately also want the same benefits and rewards as those doing more, and that is not the way life works.
4. Be flexible but maintain control. Students today are in many stages in life. Some are freshly out of school, others are balancing family life and school, and others are coming back for a second career. The program must maintain control to have a good working relationship with clinical institutions. However, having policies in place that allow some (key word *some*) flexibility in their clinic schedule without punishment may make the program more of a success for those non-traditional students. The key words: ***policies in place***; make a request for clinic change form and only allow them to do it once during their entire time in the program, have a percentage of clinic rotation be night and weekend (to comply with JRCERT standards), offer 1 or 2 days that a student can take off as PTO for emergency situations (without having to make the time up), etc.
5. Use technology to your advantage. Technology is here to stay. Platforms such as KaHoot!, Quizziz, Socrative, Padlet, ShowMe, Explain Everything, Poll Everything, etc. exist for educational purposes. Use these to your advantage! Students (even the older ones) are plugged in almost nonstop so use these apps and flip your classroom. Put the information out there and then use class time for discussion or peer review of the information. Sometimes, as instructors we forget the information is a foreign concept and can be tough to grasp because we have been around it for so long. Having peer teaching time where fresh perspectives can be introduced (and the instructor facilitate to make sure the information being discussed is correct) can increase interest in a subject and retention of information. Long dead is the lecture/note taking days of old.

Teaching is an ever-evolving career. As each new year brings new students we have an obligation to make sure that students educational needs are being met. This is done a lot on a trial and error basis. Stating there is only "the right way" to teach is as absurd as saying there is only "the right way" to learn. As we begin a new teaching semester/cohort I hope everyone reading this has an amazing new year!