

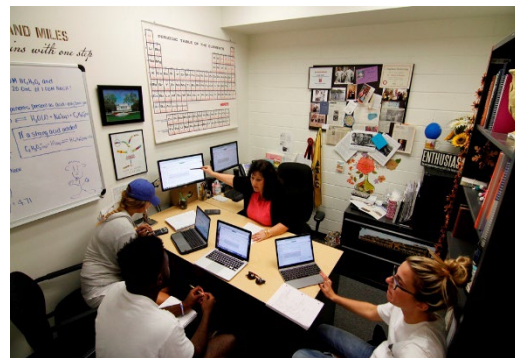


Student Hours: A Fresh Term to Convey a Student Focus in Office Hours

Studies remind us that office hours can be one of the most underutilized instructional settings (Supiano, 2023a) and students bring certain perceptions to office hours, such as office hours were merely for students who were struggling—either they didn't understand the content, had specific questions, or they had performed poorly on a test or assignment (Supiano, 2023b). There appears to be a disconnect between the intent of office hours, “I am here to help and support you” and what the student hears, “Come if you have questions or are struggling.”

When students only attend office hours to clarify content and receive feedback on how to improve their learning/performance, we overlook a chance to engage students more deeply with the course content and get to know them on a personal level.

Students could meet to discuss career aspirations in the field or ways in which the content might impact their own lives. Students could attend in small groups to hear what questions others have and begin to apply the content as meaningful to them. Thus, we might consider changing the term “office hours” to “student hours,” as this time has been set aside for the students to come and share what is of interest to them” (Mowreader, 2023). Since students appreciate having options, we might also consider providing both virtual and evening office hours, especially prior to exams.



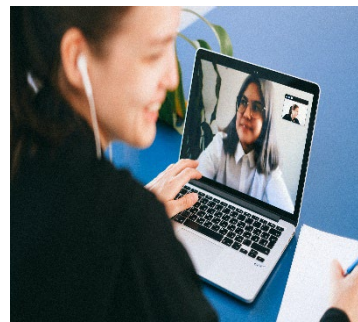
Hogan and Sathy (2022) describe three different kinds of appointments for office hours that help promote an equitable learning environment:

1. **We Greet**: a five minute get-to-know-you chat.
2. **We Meet**: a more traditional appointment.
3. **We Work** (with Treats!): students get supported practice.

This approach can be adapted to support individual or group meetings outside of the office hour setting (Supiano, 2023c). For example, “**We Greet**” might take place with a small group of students in the dining hall. Meeting in students’ spaces and in pairs/small groups helps put students at ease. This format enhances the social aspect of learning by getting to know peers and faculty in an informal setting and begins to build community. “**We Meet**” might invite students to discuss career paths within the discipline. “**We Work**” might be an opportunity for individual students or groups to examine the material in more depth, or get additional practice by utilizing extra problem sets, case studies, simulations, or software.

Questions we may consider establishing student-focused office hours:

- **How do students perceive office hours?** Might students have misconceptions about its purpose? For example, do students avoid office hours because they think you are working on something else? Clarification is critical.
- **What atmosphere does your office space convey?** Do you keep the door open before office hours begin? Is the space welcoming and inviting?
- **How do you utilize the space?** Might you be able to sit with students at a small desk separate from your office desk or next to the students rather than behind the desk? Might you have a whiteboard to work problems together?
- **What assignments might lend themselves to offering office hours?** Might students review drafts of written work? Might students practice “close reading” of texts?



Clarify the rationale for office hours and discuss how this time has been designated to support their learning and well-being. The syllabus warrants such an explanation. For example,

“You may have questions like How can I get support outside of class? How can I learn about studying abroad or internships? Office hours provide a great starting place to bring your questions, explore them. I’d like us to call ‘office hours’ ‘student hours’ as they are your time to talk with me about academic issues, and questions of importance to you. I am available on the days/times indicated and by appointment. I look forward to supporting you in this course and on your academic journey.”

Set and utilize office hours intentionally. Faculty have incorporated them into the first weeks of class to learn about students’ interests, concerns, prior knowledge related to the course, and begin to build a learning community. Students may sign up for 20–30-minute blocks. This initial welcome to the course familiarizes students with your office location and encourages them to re-visit. In the virtual environment, faculty have held “open student hours” to invite students for informal check-ins throughout the semester.

Office hours provide an opportunity to engage with students, both to deepen their understanding of the course material, and to forge connections that can assist them with achieving their goals. Office hours give us insight into how we can contribute to educating the whole person, extending “caritas.”

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