Learning and Relationships

Practical Strategies

Peter Felten | Center for Engaged Learning | Elon University

Keep doing what you already do to cultivate educational relationships.

Photos by
Martin Springborg

What is one thing that seems to be working now to build relationship-rich learning in your (or your colleagues') teaching?

What is a lesson or two we can learn from what is working now, despite all of the constraints in our current situation?

“These horizontal peer-to-peer relationships are the ones that keep students - especially students who are marginalized - from letting each other fail.”

(David Scobey, Bringing Theory to Practice)

“My professor made something as boring as rocks interesting. The passion she had—she wasn’t just giving me information—her subject was something that she loved. And the way that she explained it, for some reason, I wanted to learn everything about rocks. The most important thing is that the class became a community. She made us interact with each other and with the subject. It just came together because of her passion.”

(José Robles, Nevada State College)

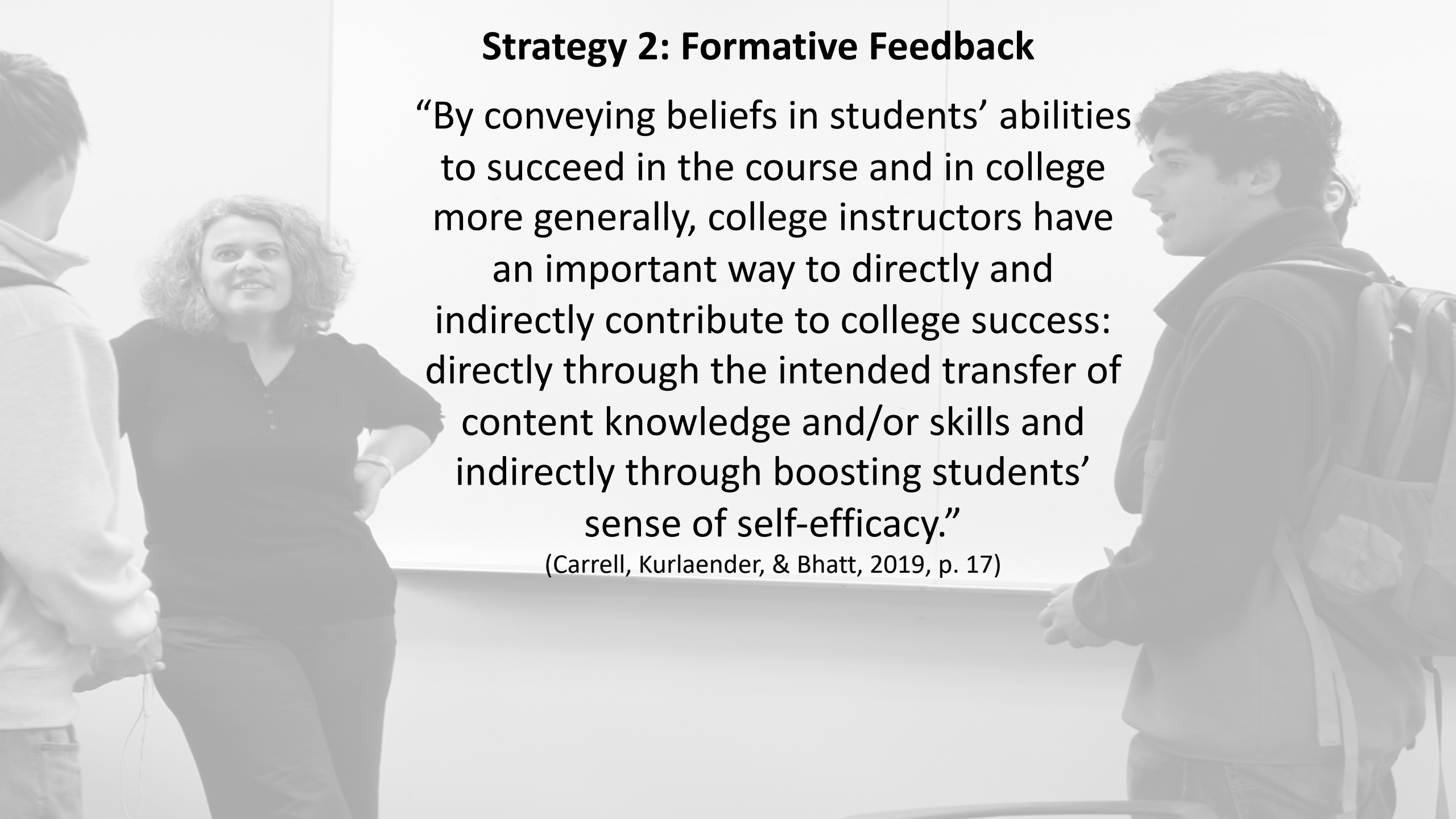
Strategy 1: Use Student Names

When students perceive an instructor knows their names, they report feeling more valued, motivated, and comfortable asking for help.

(Cooper et al., 2017)

“I didn’t understand why the instructors asked us to use name tents. At first I thought it was pointless, no one really cares what your name is. Now I [see that] knowing someone’s name will help you talk to them. Calling people by name is better than, ‘Hey, want to study later?’”

(Erika, p. 10, in Cooper et al., 2017)



Strategy 2: Formative Feedback

"By conveying beliefs in students' abilities to succeed in the course and in college more generally, college instructors have an important way to directly and indirectly contribute to college success: directly through the intended transfer of content knowledge and/or skills and indirectly through boosting students' sense of self-efficacy."

(Carrell, Kurlaender, & Bhatt, 2019, p. 17)

Dear XXX, [students earning B]

As we approach mid-term, I'm writing to give you some quick feedback.

You've done particularly well so far on [e.g., quizzes, homework, in-class writing]. Keep up the good work on that!

I encourage you also to take advantage of [e.g., online formative quizzing] to be even more prepared and successful in the second half of the term.

If you have questions or would like to chat, stop by my Zoom hours [details].

See you in class Monday –

Strategy 3: Structured Active Learning

This paper compares learning and achievement in large intro STEM course in 3 formats: (1) Face-to-face lecture, (2) Hybrid with many required active learning activities, (3) Fully online with some required active learning activities

(Gavassa et al., 2019)

“Even though the face-to-face format had the highest contact time, it also resulted in the lowest performance.”

(Gavassa et al., 2019)

”Although the hybrid and online courses had identical online resources, the hybrid had additional in-class active-learning exercises done in teams and with support from undergraduate learning assistants and the instructor….[which were] particularly beneficial for underrepresented students.”

(Gavassa et al., 2019)

Strategy 4: Collaborative testing

"Analyses revealed that with the exception of upper performers, students performed better overall on the collaborative tests. Additionally, regardless of their academic abilities, students performed better on the higher order thinking questions under collaborative conditions. This improvement was equal across different academic abilities, suggesting that collaborative testing promotes higher order thinking even when taking into account previous academic abilities."

(Mahoney & Harris-Reeves, 2019, p. 25)

"Learning and talking together, we break the notion that our experience of gaining knowledge is private, individualistic, and competitive. By choosing and fostering dialogue, we engage mutually in a learning partnership."

(hooks, 2009, p. 43)

“Beyond the serious science we’re doing, there's this whole other aspect of caring about each other's lives. The faculty will make the time to ask, ‘How are your classes going?’ ‘What are you thinking about for next year?’ ‘What are you getting involved in outside of the lab?’ ‘Who do you want to be after you graduate?’ And then they would really listen and encourage me, even when I wasn’t sure if I knew what I was doing or where I was going.”

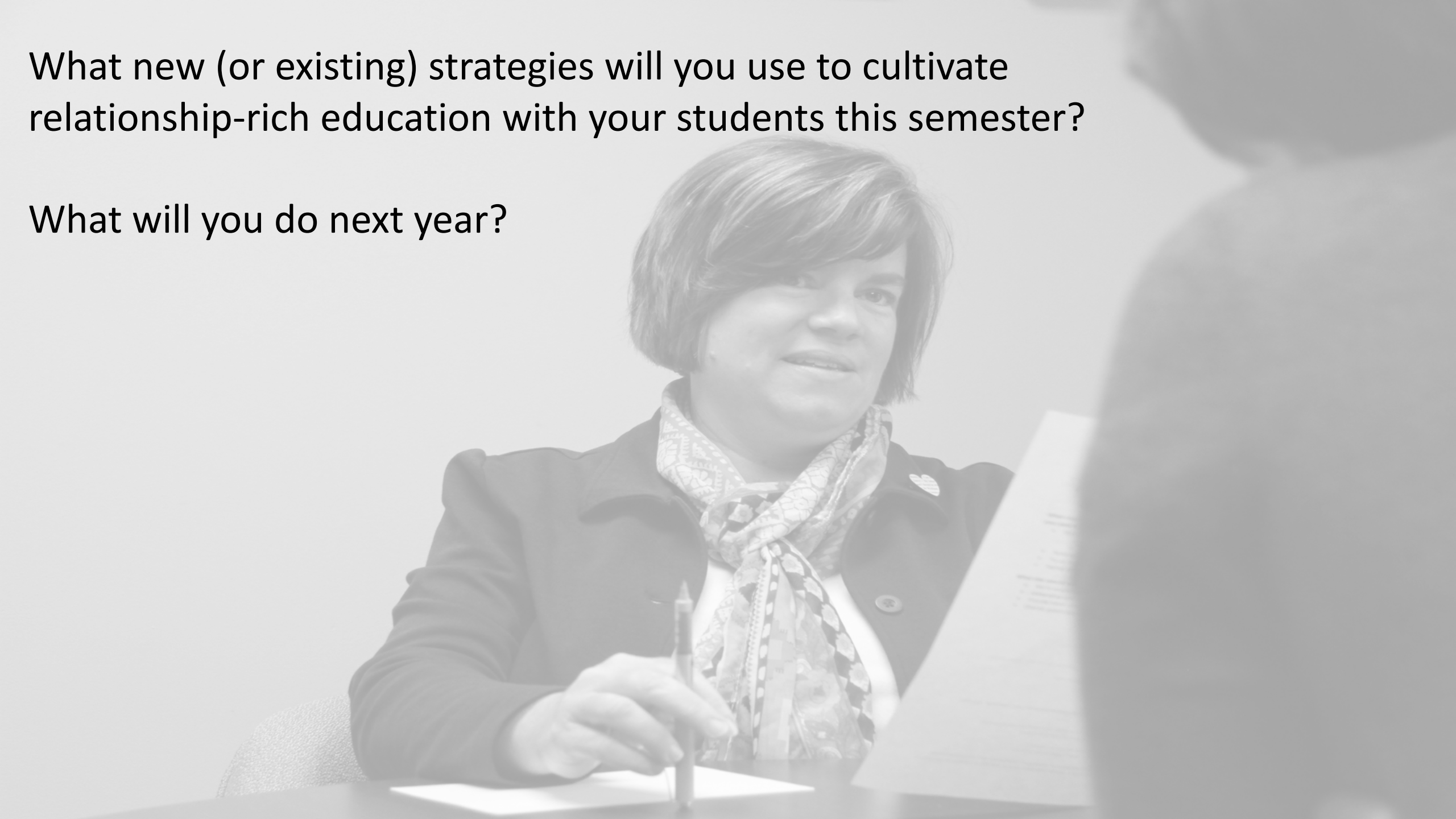
(Samantha Paskvan, University of Washington)

“Some instructors realize your true self even before you do. That was especially true for me with Professor Staats. She would say to me - ‘When you get published. When you earn your Ph.D. When you become a professor.’ - things that I would not have even imagined would be possible for me. That type of conversation is very inspiring and very supportive, especially for first-generation students or students who might just be having a hard time transitioning to college life.”

(Gina Roxas, Oakton Community College)

What new (or existing) strategies will you use to cultivate relationship-rich education with your students this semester?

What will you do next year?



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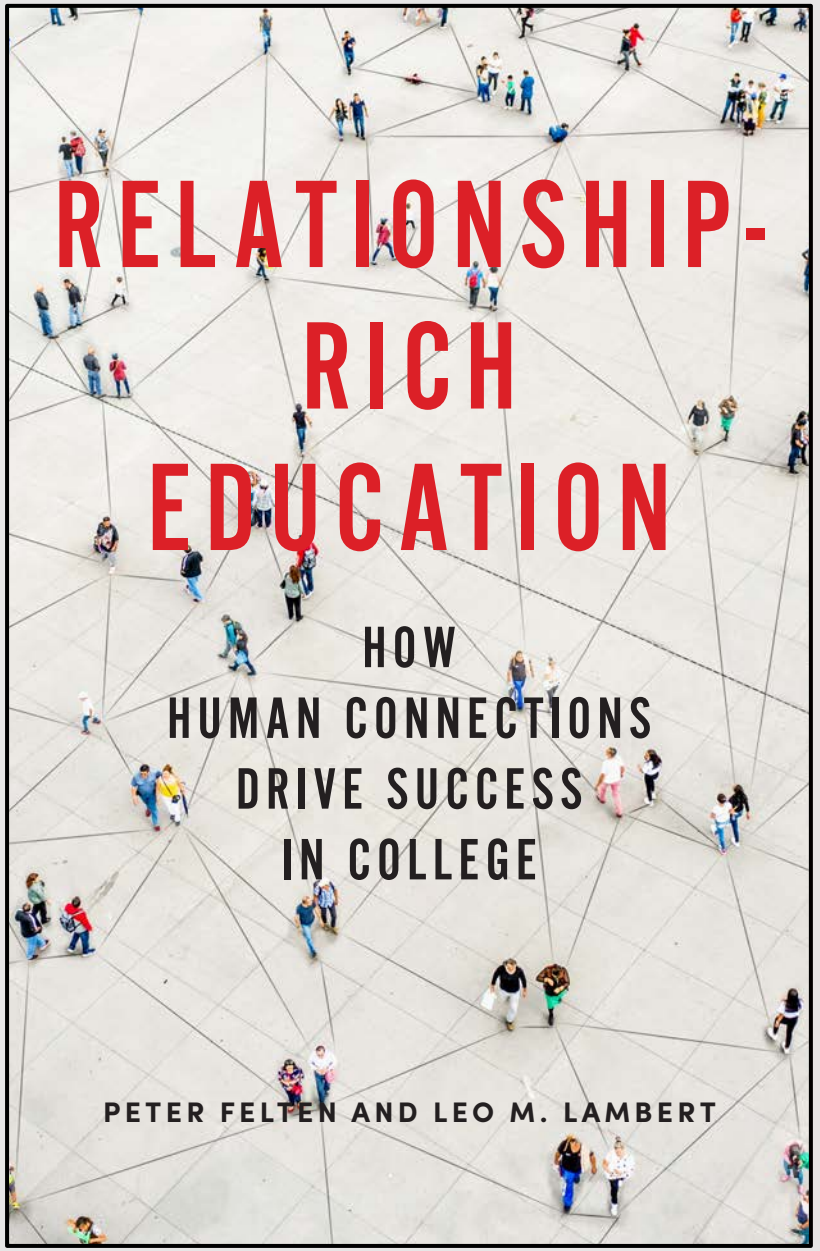

pfelten@elon.edu
@pfeltenNC