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Know Our Names, Make Us Think

By Matthew Gillespie

When I first stepped into Dr. Maorong Jiang's Political Science 101 class, I had no great expectations for what I'd take out of it. True, it was in a subject I felt passionate about, but I had low expectations for a class that would be vying for my attention during a Friday afternoon.

It wasn't until I visited Dr. Jiang during his office hours one day that that very passion was invoked. I dropped by to discuss a frustration with writing a paper for his class, and, needless to say, I was not expecting to leave with more than a few quick suggestions. Instead, what began as a largely technical question quickly expanded into a diverse range of topics, before finally settling down as Dr. Jiang urged me to push myself to my intellectual limit not just for his class, but my entire career at Creighton. It was from this and subsequent conversations with Dr. Jiang that I later became involved in the school newspaper, school government, and began on a path to professional school.

To this day, Dr. Jiang continues to invest himself in my future, well after I have changed majors and finished taking his class. It is from him that I have learned what the cryptic term *magis* truly means, a lesson that I hope to carry with me well beyond my short career at Creighton.

While the relationship between students and teachers, especially at a collegiate level, is complicated, there is an underappreciated and often untapped potential to be found. This potential is often unexpressed, and is

difficult to recognize, but a student's path to success in college and beyond begins with the student believing that they have a faculty that shows genuine regard for their future.

There are several factors to showing this regard, but the most basic is for faculty to know the names of their students. While it might seem obvious, one of the advantages of a Jesuit education is the emphasis it places on the student, and this emphasis begs for the professor to have at least a basic knowledge of their students. While professors with large class sizes or a number of different sections might be validated in their trepidation, a visible effort to learn names within the first few weeks of school is not lost on students, and failing to do so can signal apathy on behalf of the professor, even when none is intended.

The failure to learn names can...

In a related vein, interacting with students outside of the classroom is a cornerstone of a meaningful education. Whether it be as brief and simple as clarifying an issue for an essay during office hours, or as unexpected as a chance meeting in the milk aisle of the grocery store, these interactions significantly define how students look at their

own education, and can plant the seeds for future interactions.

Of course, all of these tactics lose their gusto if the effects are not translated into the classroom. In this sense, students want and need to be forced to think. Whether by challenging a student to validate a claim in a paper or suggesting an additional text to read to expand one's knowledge on a subject, these actions compel students to sit, evaluate and address the purpose behind a class. Students learn by critical thought, and it's up to the professor to foster an environment in which critical thought is welcome.

All of these actions, in some form or fashion, show students that you feel invested in them as human beings, and it, in turn, makes them want to show an investment in the classroom. Students don't want confidence in them and their abilities to be misplaced, and will strive for success if they feel their efforts are recognized.

While there are countless other means of achieving the same goal, they all center around one truth: students need support. I've been fortunate to belong to the journalism, media and computing department at Creighton University, in which it's the norm, not the exception, to drop into a professor's office even if it is "just to chat," and in which success beyond Creighton is a mutually shared vision between faculty and students.

While college is considered their transformative years, they still look for guidance in those around them. As students continue to learn and grow, so too do they continue to seek love and faith to inspire them. As St. Ignatius once said, "Love is shown more in deeds than in words," and may we all hope to live them. ■

Matthew Gillespie is a junior journalism major at Creighton University.

