



VILLANOVA INSTITUTE FOR
TEACHING AND LEARNING



Connections Are Everything

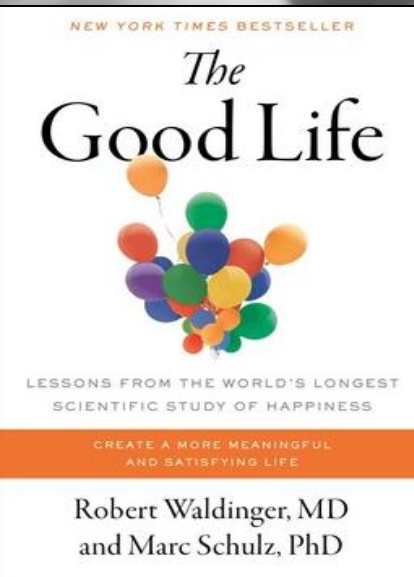
How Trusting Relationships Drive Student Success

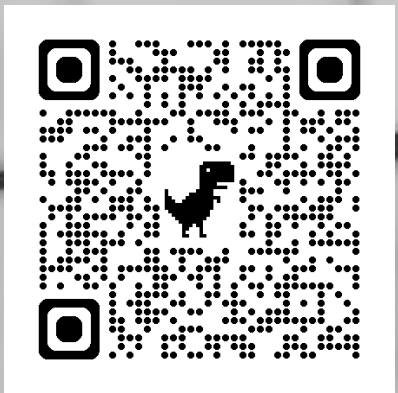
Peter Felten, Center for Engaged Learning, Elon University

Photos from Horii & Springborg (2022)

Student-faculty, student-staff, and student-student relationships are crucial for learning, well-being, belonging, and success.

(Mayhew et al., 2016)





Trust

“students’ willingness to take risks based on their judgment that the teacher is committed to student success.”

(Chew & Cerbin, 2021, p. 23)



Student trust is *not* ...

... high in institutions or in faculty/staff.

(Fosnacht & Calderone, 2020)

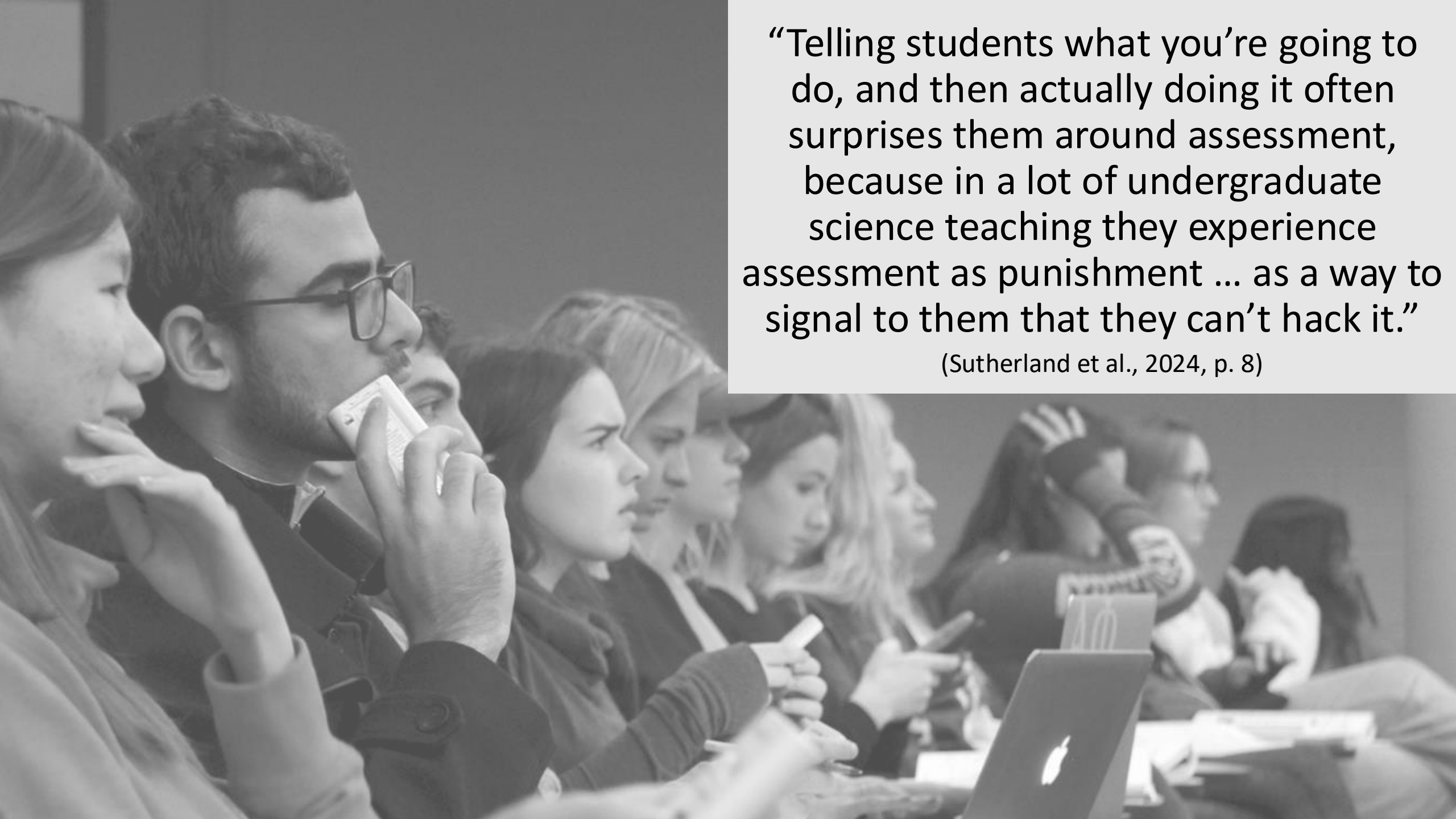
.... high *between* students.

(Eddy et al., 2017)



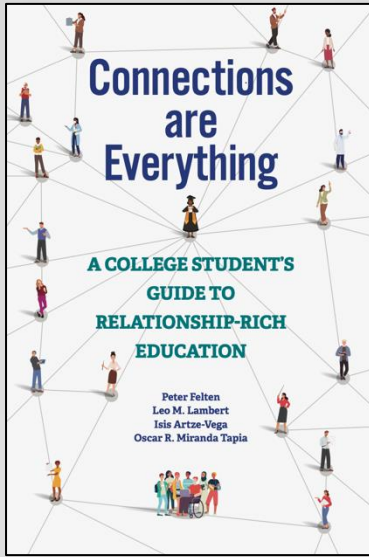
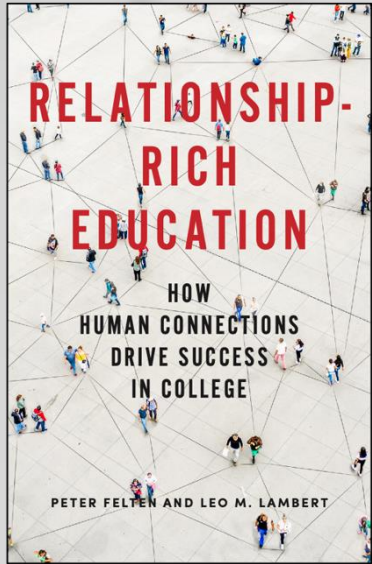


(Sutherland et al., 2024, p. 8)



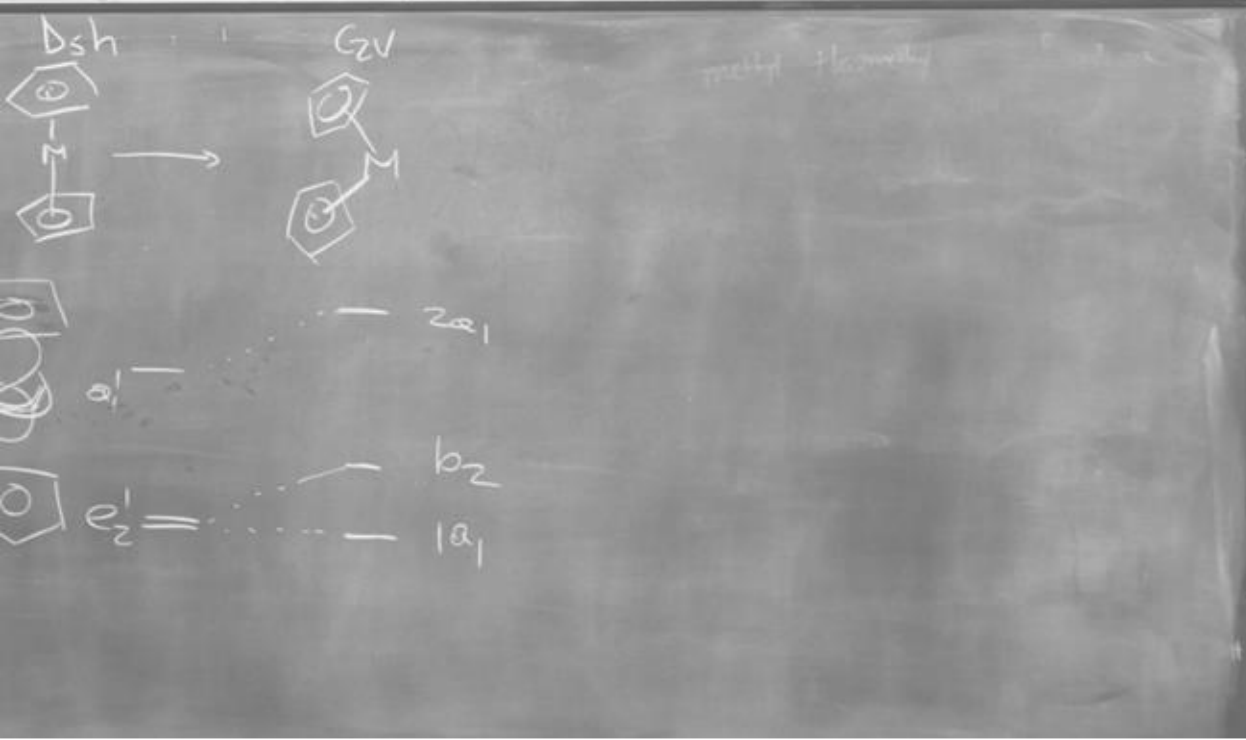
“Telling students what you’re going to do, and then actually doing it often surprises them around assessment, because in a lot of undergraduate science teaching they experience assessment as punishment ... as a way to signal to them that they can’t hack it.”

(Sutherland et al., 2024, p. 8)



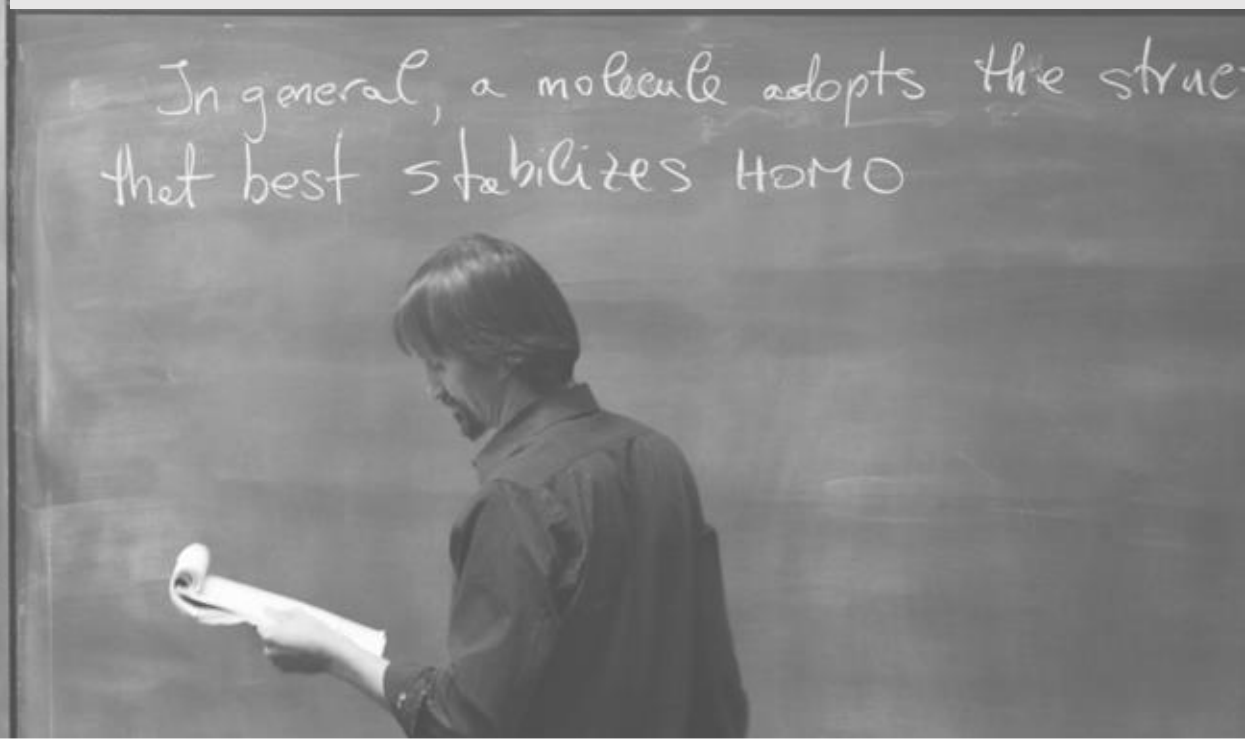
What works to build trusting relationships with and among students?
What are barriers to these relationships in your teaching context?





"I was thrilled to be at UW. But, sitting in these large classrooms...I convinced myself that they're all more successful than me. I was comparing myself to others and imagining all of their accomplishments. I was freaking out, to be honest."

(Gigi Gaultier, University of Washington)





“Once students recognize that you care about them, about where they come from, about their goals and what they’re trying to accomplish, then you have a strong foundation for teaching and learning.”

(Matthew Smith, California State University Dominguez Hills)

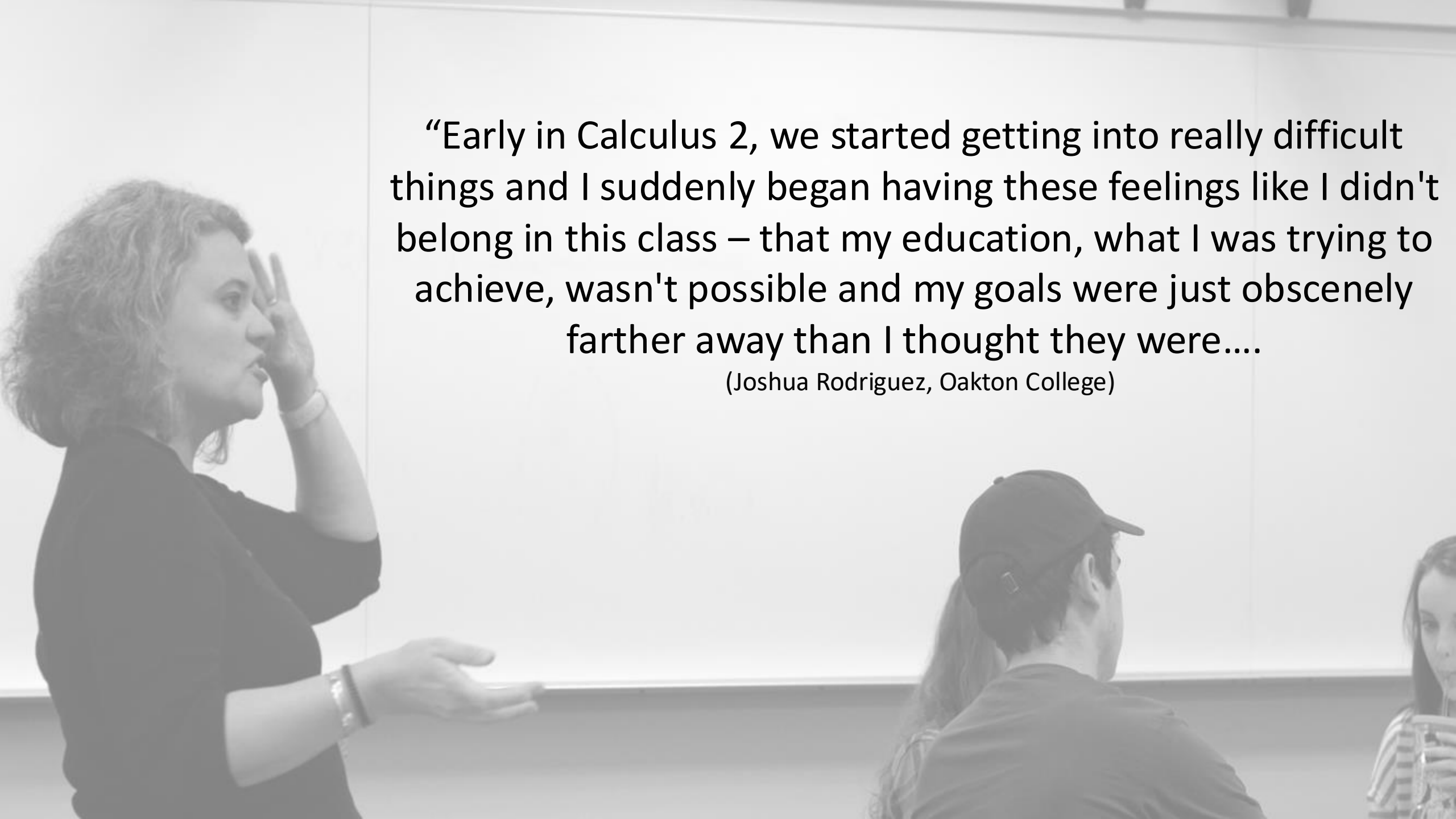
Validation Theory

(Rendón, 1994; Hallett et al, 2023)

“My professor made something as boring as rocks interesting. The passion she had...her subject was something that she loved. 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.”

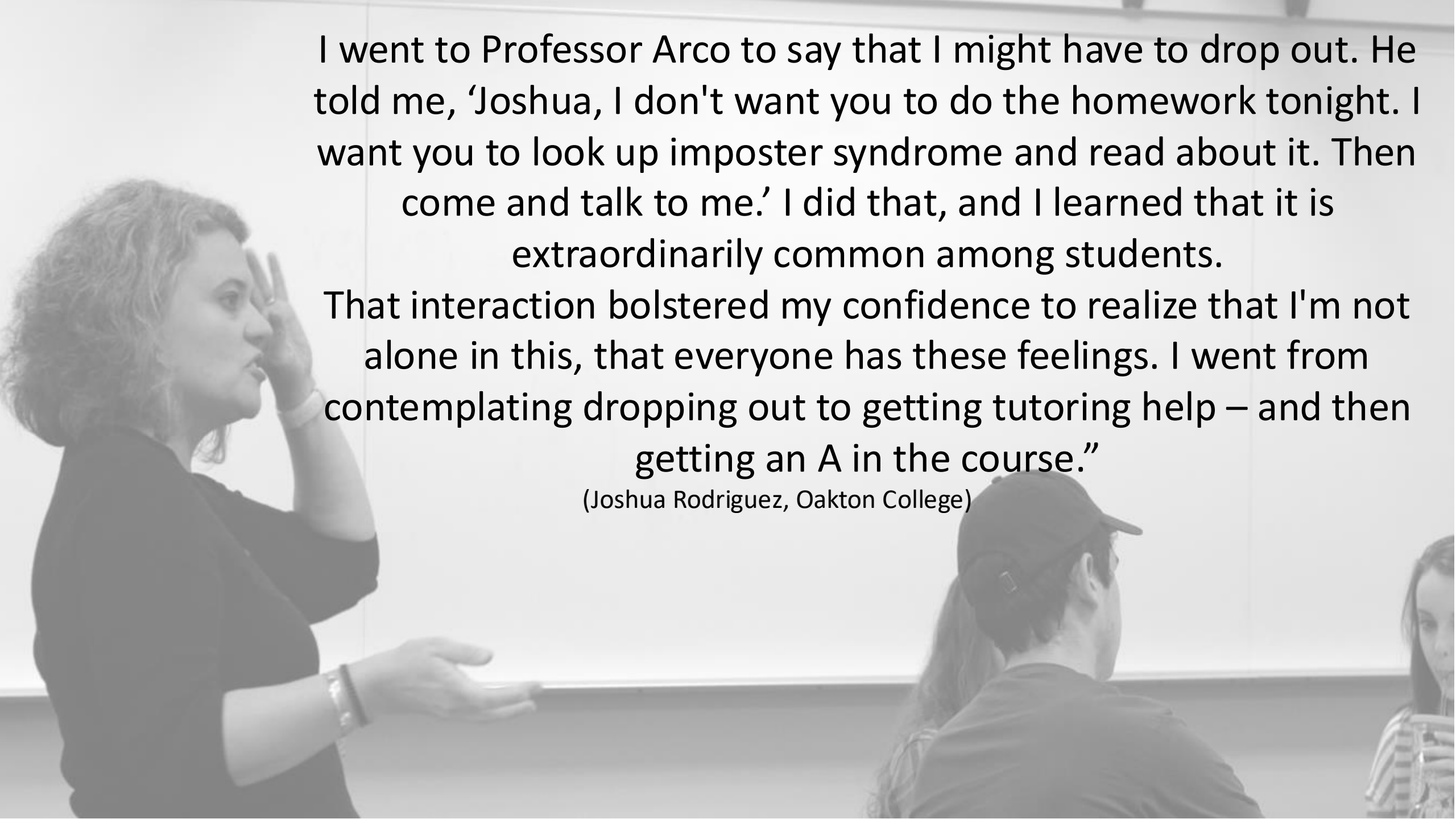
(José Robles, Nevada State College)





“Early in Calculus 2, we started getting into really difficult things and I suddenly began having these feelings like I didn't belong in this class – that my education, what I was trying to achieve, wasn't possible and my goals were just obscenely farther away than I thought they were....

(Joshua Rodriguez, Oakton College)



I went to Professor Arco to say that I might have to drop out. He told me, 'Joshua, I don't want you to do the homework tonight. I want you to look up imposter syndrome and read about it. Then come and talk to me.' I did that, and I learned that it is extraordinarily common among students.

That interaction bolstered my confidence to realize that I'm not alone in this, that everyone has these feelings. I went from contemplating dropping out to getting tutoring help – and then getting an A in the course.”

(Joshua Rodriguez, Oakton College)



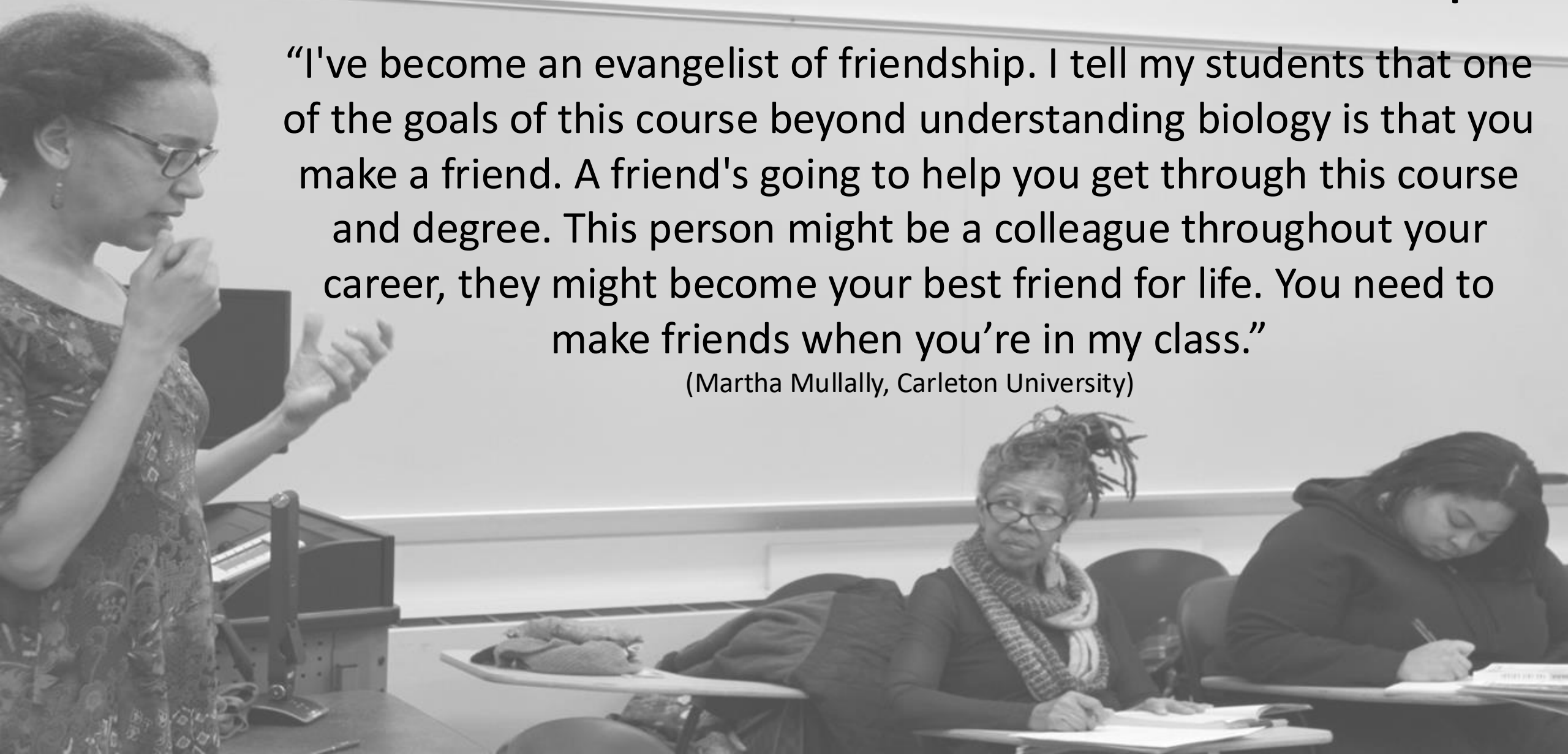
We need to help all students:

- 1. Understand** that relationships matter for their learning, well-being, and success.
- 2. Learn** strategies to connect meaningfully with faculty, staff, and peers.
- 3. Act** in ways that enable them to build trust and relationships.

Practice 1: Talk with students about the value of relationships

“I've become an evangelist of friendship. I tell my students that one of the goals of this course beyond understanding biology is that you make a friend. A friend's going to help you get through this course and degree. This person might be a colleague throughout your career, they might become your best friend for life. You need to make friends when you're in my class.”

(Martha Mullally, Carleton University)

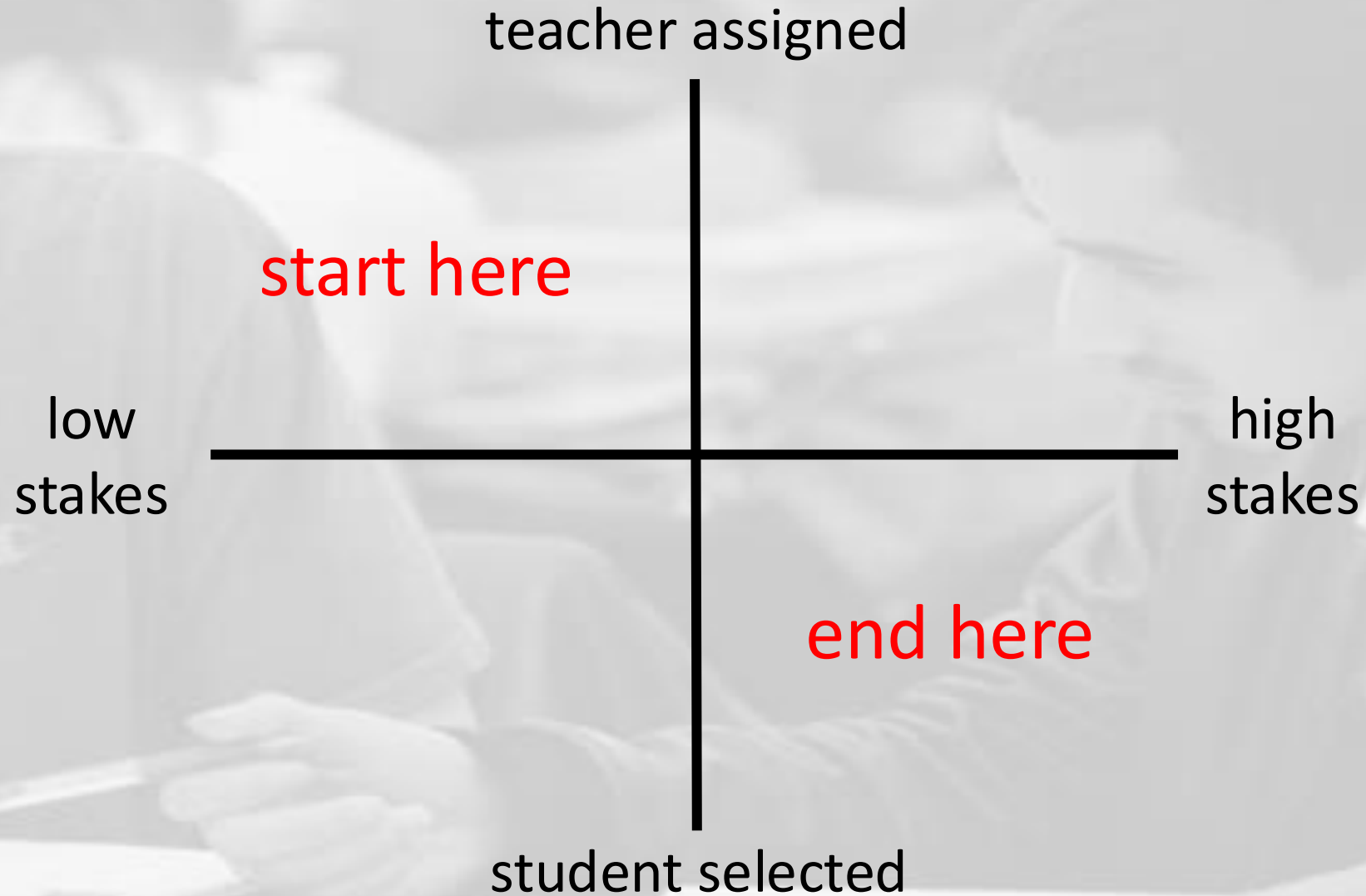


Practice 2: Have students give structured feedback to peers

(Hart-Davidson & Meeks, 2020)



Practice 3: Sequence group work to promote student learning, well-being, and connections

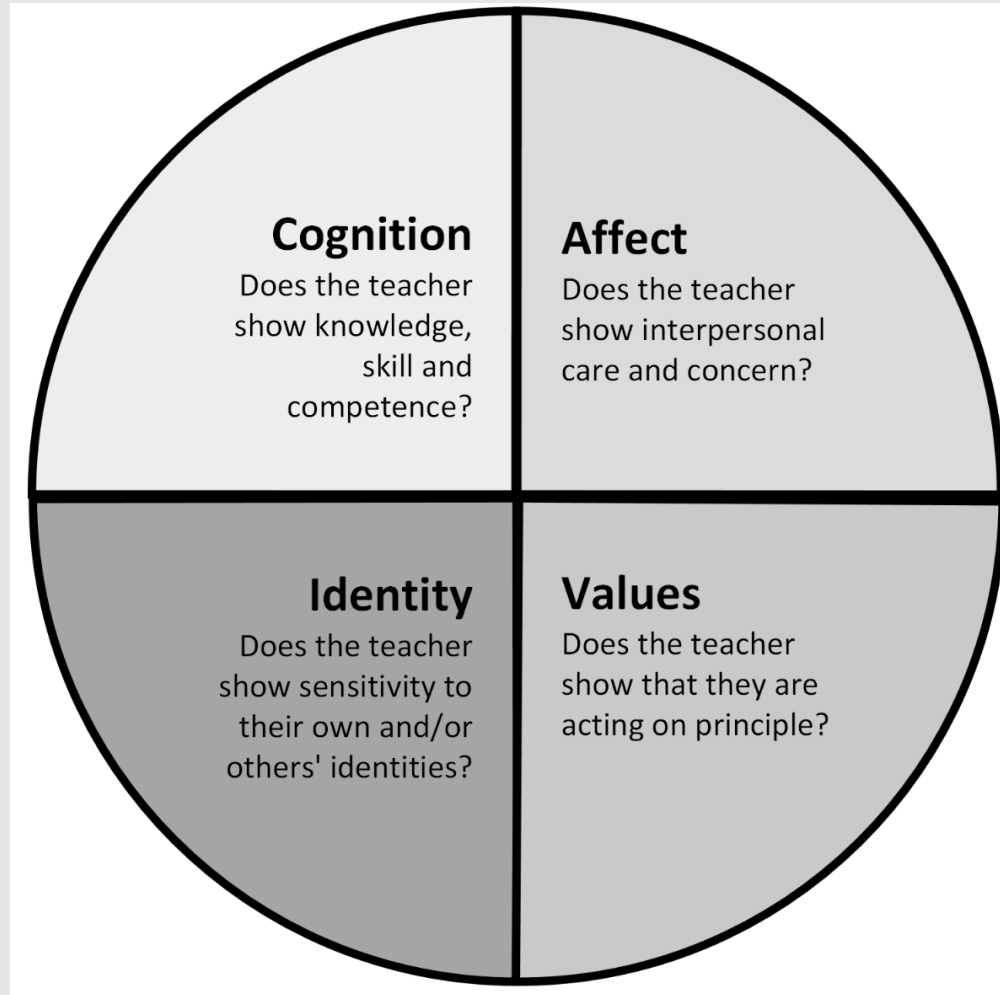


(Fjelkner Phil, 2022)

Practice 4: Make ‘trust moves’

“Our students go into the health professions, so I tell them that they need to really know their stuff because people’s lives are at stake. I say my teaching will push you and my exams will challenge you to prepare you.”

“I let my students know that I’m a first-generation college graduate, and that I’m from a working-class background. My dad was a coal miner and a factory worker.”



“On the first day of class, I give students note cards where they write their names and I’ll ask for some random facts, could be favourite song.... I think that’s something that builds trust with them.”

“When doing in-class labs, I will demo what it should look like in terms of how you ask permission to touch a patient, explaining what you’re going to be doing specifically, and then explaining what landmarks you’ll use...and just emphasize how to do it in a professional manner.”

Keep doing what works for you and your students.
More often. More intentionally.



“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)



“It only takes meeting that one person
who ignites a fire within you.”

(Tianna Guerra, Oakton College)



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