

## Resource Guide

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### Gratitude Expressions in Teaching

Gratitude involves reflecting, articulating, and responding to thoughts and emotions related to receiving positive experiences from others. Unlike feelings of happiness or indebtedness towards others, gratitude often requires thinking rationally, logically, and critically about how conditions and people influence our lives. The effects of gratitude can have a profound impact: experiencing gratitude can motivate others to repay and expand generosity to third parties while expressing gratitude has been shown to reinforce benefactors for their generosity (McCullough, Kimeldorf, 2008).

A growing body of research suggests that applying gratitude within academic settings can have a deep impact on students' relationship towards learning (Howells, 2004; Safaria, 2014). Giving students the time to reflect, articulate, and enact gratitude can help students develop a deeper relationship towards academic concepts, increase motivation to learn, build confidence, and help develop a sense of interconnectedness with learning. Below are just a few ways gratitude can be incorporated into your teaching environment.

- **Have students keep a learning journal:** Create a journal assignment where students reflect and write on their relationship towards learning. Have the journal center around gratitude by asking them to answer reflective questions. For example, have students reflect on the question, "How is where you are in life today different than a year ago—and what positive changes are you thankful for?" Or "What is something you're grateful to have learned this week?" More prompts can be found [\[HERE\]](#)
- **Write a letter:** Have students write a letter to someone who has had an impact on their learning. Have them write specific details about what they appreciate about the person and send the letter.
- **Visit someone you appreciate:** Have students write a letter to someone they appreciate; however, instead of mailing it, deliver the letter in person. Encourage students to read their letter out loud to the recipient and give the letter as a memento.
- **Survey for gratitude:** McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002) have created a brief [survey](#) to help students assess and develop a disposition for gratitude. Have students complete the survey and write a reflection paper on the results.

#### Resources

Howells, K. (2004). The role of gratitude in higher education. *Research and Development in Higher Education*, 27, 164-73.

McCullough, M. E., Kimeldorf, M. B., & Cohen, A. D. (2008). An adaptation for altruism: The social causes, social effects, and social evolution of gratitude. *Current directions in psychological science*, 17(4), 281-285.

McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J. (2002). The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82, 112-127.

Safaria, T. (2014). Forgiveness, gratitude, and happiness among college students. *International Journal of Public Health Science (IJPHS)*, 3(4), 241-245.

*For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center at [ctl@slu.edu](mailto:ctl@slu.edu).*