

What I Wish my Professors Knew  
Survey Highlights  
SGA Curriculum Committee, March 1

**Mental Health**

I wish my professors knew that getting out of bed in the morning is sometimes really difficult, and it has nothing to do with apathy/laziness, but rather everything to do with depression. I wish my professors knew that I sometimes want to cry in class but I'm really trying to keep it together and calling on me some days just makes things harder. I wish my professors knew how much I appreciated them. They're so kind I still wish they understood, though, that not coming to class isn't anything personal. It typically means I'm dealing with something.

I wish my professors knew that many of us have positions, (official or unofficial or simply reputation-based) within our houses that can often lead to hours upon hours of intense emotional labor, which goes unpaid and is often unrecognized entirely. Ask any Smithie if they have ever sacrificed time they had planned to use for homework in order to help care for the mental health of their housemates or friends, and I guarantee they will say 'yes.' I have and I know many, many students who have spent all night awake with a friend who was at serious risk of harming themselves. Just know that sometimes things like that that can't be considered family emergencies or officially 'extenuating circumstances' do come up and influence our lives and that sometimes rubs off on our ability to complete our classwork. Check in on your students and if someone is truly doing their best on assignments and is in need of an extension for these reasons, understand them & believe them.

I wish my professors knew I have anxiety. I have housing accommodations but not academic ones, so there is no way for them to know what I am struggling with.

**In-Class Work/Participation**

I am sure it is really difficult for professors to get everything done, but it is really critical to students that work is returned to us in a timely fashion. When tests and papers are returned a month after they were handed in, it is really difficult for us not only to know how we are doing in our classes grade-wise but also to gauge the effectiveness of our studying methods (particularly important for first years like myself).

That not everyone participates in the same way, and speaking during whole class discussions isn't the only way of participating. Some people are more comfortable talking in small groups or with a partner. Some people prefer to write their thoughts down. Some people do prefer to talk to a large groups. There should be multiple approaches to engage everyone.

I would love if Smith Professors related topics in class to current events, like what's on the front page of the newspaper that day, in both STEM classes and social science classes. Also please mention careers and career events related to that subject. Jordan Crouser does a fantastic job of this in his CSC 111 class where he shows a flyer on the projector of a lunch presentation or a guest lecturer who's visiting Smith in the upcoming week. I went to 3 events I wouldn't normally had gone to if not for that information/welcome.

I wish they would post readings at least a week ahead of time. I need a lot of advance notice so I can plan my schedule accordingly, so them posting the readings closer to when they are due means I am less likely to read them. Also, emailing papers is much cheaper for students. Professors don't have to pay to print; students do.

I wish all Professors would practice the move-up/move-back system. I had a Professor doing this and it helped A LOT regulating air time within the class. The system is pretty simple: every class (or a few times during the semester) the Professor reminds students that not everyone feels comfortable participating, and students who participate a lot can make this even harder on those who don't. Therefore, whenever a student is taking too much space the Professor intervenes and asks them to "move back for a little bit" and requests that someone that hasn't spoken say something instead. Sometimes, students' eagerness to participate in a discussion results in them not realizing they are monopolizing it. This can add to others feeling intimidated. Professors have an opportunity to intervene and help greatly.

### **Work Load**

I wish they knew how much I had going on! I find it tremendously helpful to have detailed syllabi so I can lay out all of my work for a week at the beginning. If the syllabus is never updated after a change, I find myself in a quandary.

Printing isn't free for students!

I wish there was greater communication between departments so my professors could better understand my workload.

### **Accessibility**

1) When a person with a disability related to slow processing speed is confused about the subject matter, it helps to give them a few more seconds to process the information at hand or slowly rephrase it (but without making us look dumb). Giving quick hints and speaking fast makes it harder to process even more information and heightens anxiety. 2) It would be nice if when there is a neuroatypical person in the class, that the professor speaks a bit slower and pauses between topics to show a clear transition as much as possible, especially when giving instructions for in-class assignments and group work. When a professor goes through a spot that is difficult for the class, it would be nice if they don't start slow, and then ramble through the next 5 steps (or vice versa), which will probably make it hard to follow and fill in knowledge gaps. Instead, please keep a steady pace and emphasize important points throughout the explanation. Usually the answer is to please slow down. 3) Sometimes, a person with a disability will have days when their work is either more or less affected by the disability. I would like to emphasize that we ask for accommodations because they will be necessary for us to submit as thorough a job as our classmates either always or a lot of the time. Please try to understand this, and don't assume that because quizzes and tests are "very easy/short" that we won't need time extensions.

I wish my professors knew that due to my psychiatric disabilities, speaking up in class and in large groups is very difficult for me and thus the "participation" portion of the grade is lost no matter how engaged I am with the material. I wish my professors knew that their strict absence policies hurt disabled students like me who suffer from med side effects and severe fatigue.

I wish my professors knew how to make classes more accessible to students with ADHD. Some professors' natural class structure fit perfectly (they break down large projects with smaller deadlines, they distribute all materials and also put them all up on Moodle, they send reminders via email about upcoming due dates and mention them in class, they are flexible about late homework) but others' distinctly do not fit (their assignments have artificial/undefined deadlines or all assignments are technically due at once but expected to be handed in staggered, they make materials inaccessible if lost [i.e. only give out a hard copy and do not upload a digital copy], they give harsh late penalties).

## **Sensitivity**

I wish my professors knew the first 10 minutes of the first day of class often sets a precedent for the level of safety and comfort I will feel in the classroom for the rest of the year. It is vital that professors include time in their class to learn their students pronouns, and that they adhere to preferred name/nickname, not legal name if calling attendance (it's best to just allow students to introduce themselves).

That the non-traditional students might...1. Not be as computer savvy 2. Not be exposed to some of the language that might be the norm to other students. 3. Have families, jobs and lives outside of the classroom. 4. Sometimes need to talk to them on a human level, without us (the students) feeling as if we are dumb, insignificant (please be more sensitive and accommodating); and should already know the material (if we did, we wouldn't need to be here). 5. That we have other classes, so that should be taken into consideration when they are assigning readings and homework. 6. That we are still human beings just trying to make it in this world...(some of us might be coming in with a lot on our plates, and are trying to juggle everything to the best of our abilities).

I wish professors knew that not everyone in a given class uses she/her pronouns, and that the default shouldn't be to label all students as women.

I wish my professors knew how hard it is to be a student here. I'm constantly fighting to stay here because of my family's financial situation and when I'm fighting to just BE here, it's really hard to always prioritize my grades. Can't get grades, good or bad, if I'm not here. I wish they knew how isolating it is being a poor student who comes from a working class family. So many of my classmates can just focus on being students and getting the best grades possible but I'm working 10 hours a week, the max work study allows me now, working under the table when I can, all just to be able to stay here. So no, professor, I didn't do the reading. I was up trying to write one of several letters to Student Financial Services just to be able to continue being a student here. I wish they knew I've never been able to register for classes on time because I always have a hold put on my account. I wish they knew how embarrassed I felt when I have to explain that to them every semester. I wish they knew that I always feel like the rug is just about to be pulled out from under me. Also, let me bring my laptop to class. I can't print out every goddamn reading because it costs money and that shit adds up. It's the little classist things like that that really make me want to scream.

## **Appreciation**

Hey professor for my first year seminar- when everything is changing around me, when all I want to do is go back to high school, when nothing in my life could have possibly prepared me for the culture shock

that is college, you always manage to put a smile on my face. I absolutely love your class. It feels like home.

I appreciate the welcoming class environment and welcoming office hours. The class dynamics are actually fantastic compared to all other colleges I've spent time at.

I wish my Smith professors knew how admired and respected they are. Their insights and contributions to the campus community and the lives of their students are invaluable.

On a positive note, some of my professors at Smith have changed my life. I never could have imagined I would find a place that would both push me and support me at the same time. I am so grateful!

### **Takeaways**

What was one thing that surprised you?

What's one piece of advice that you plan to incorporate into your classes after this luncheon?

What's one question you would ask one of the responding students? How would you further these conversations with your current/future students?