

Embedding etiquette skills in science course assists undergraduate career preparation

In our fast-paced, technology-driven world, the age-old custom and etiquette of writing a thank-you note may often be forgotten. Educators often assume undergraduates have mastered the art of crafting a thoughtful and articulate thank-you note by the time they enter college, but this is not always the case. To provide students with the opportunity to master this important professional skill we added it to our upper level (juniors and seniors) biology class, BSCI 735 Cell Biology. To ensure the thank-you notes were written in a professional style, the University's Career Consultant provided a workshop during class time. She provided examples of persons who should receive thank-you notes and the types of occasions that warrant them (Table 1).

Level of Achievement	Functionality: Email copied to Professor	Appropriate Beginning and End of the Note	Demonstrate that you listened to the speaker	Take Away message	Writing skills (spelling, punctuation, grammar, capitalization)
Excellent 2 points	Note was emailed to the speaker within 24 hours. Thank you note email was copied to Professor first time sent.	Appropriate salutation, closing and signature were used.	Clearly stated the focus of the talk.	Clearly stated what you learned. If not the talk or what you found interesting.	The note is on or five.
Intermediate 2 points	Note was emailed to the speaker after 24 h period had passed. Professor had to receive a second copy of email because they were not copied on the original.	Only appropriate salutation, closing or signature used.	Focus of the talk was briefly or inaccurately mentioned.	What you learned or found interesting was vaguely mentioned.	There was one error or a couple of minor edits needed.
No effect 0 points	A thank you note was not sent. Professor never got copy of email. Or copy sent after original 24 h period.	Neither appropriate salutation, closing nor signature was used.	Focus of the talk was not mentioned.	Did not mention what you learned or found interesting.	There were multiple errors and/or edits required.
TOTAL = 30					
Comments:					

Table 1

It was emphasized that sending a well-crafted thank-you note would set them apart from their peers in a competitive marketplace for jobs and graduate school. To facilitate discussion, peer feedback and evaluation, the students were broken into groups of four and asked to evaluate a thank-you note provided by the Consultant. After fifteen minutes, the thank-you notes were projected on the board in front of the class and each group reported the errors and omissions they had evaluated. The class discussion was robust, with students gaining a new awareness of the information that needed to be included, and of the importance of the task. The Consultant pointed out additional errors that the class had missed and explained the rationale behind her critique.

Undergraduate Experience	Recipient
Graduate/Professional School Interview	Admissions personnel they met
Internship/Shadowing Experience	Individual providing direct supervision
Academic Advisor/Recommendation Letter Author	Faculty/Committee Members contributing to their career advancement

Table 2. Occasions for sending a thank-you note

After the workshop, the instructor assigned the class to write and email the Consultant a thank-you note within twenty-four hours of her presentation. A grading rubric was provided to the students (Table 2). The Consultant graded the assignment with the rubric and provided feedback to the students. The instructor received graded copies of the student thank-you e-mails and reviewed the Consultant's feedback. This activity provided both students and instructor with clear expectations of what a well-crafted thank-you note should look like. Throughout the rest of the semester several guest speakers came into class and gave a presentation. The students' were assigned to write them a thank-you note that included the following; name of speaker and date of visit, a mention of their specific topic and one thing they found interesting about the presentation. Over the course of the semester the quality of the students' thank-you notes improved. This type of class assignment embedded instruction of a professional skill into the course curriculum. By having the Career Consultant be the leader of the initiative it added some real-world credibility to the assignment and elevated its importance. It also increased the awareness of the students of the services provided by the Internship & Career Planning office. Finally, we hope that the acquisition of these professionalism skills during their undergraduate careers can help students land their first jobs, or ensure successful entry into graduate school.

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Publication

[The art and practice of gratitude: practicing an overlooked skill to help undergraduate biology students become successful professionals.](#)

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