

What and Who Inspires Students to Become Engaged Learners?

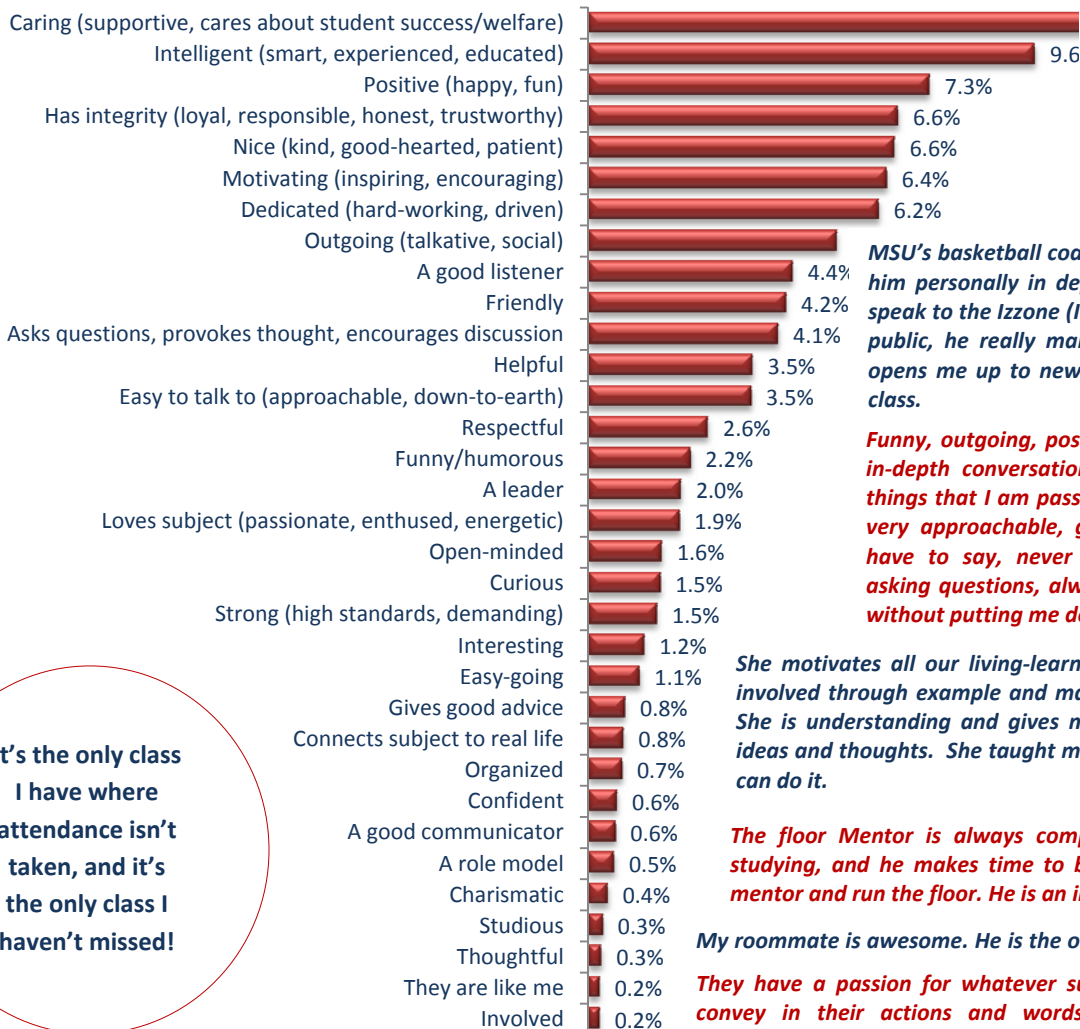
There is considerable university-wide attention on encouraging and enhancing the learning environment for students throughout all aspects of the MSU community. Each fall the Department of Residence Life conducts a living environment survey in campus residence halls. Almost 8000 of our on-campus students shared their opinions about their out-of-classroom experiences. This year (Fall 2007), two open-ended questions were added to the survey to probe students' perceptions of what and who inspires them to learn.

These are the questions:

1. **“Think of an individual who stimulates you to think, reflect, connect ideas, explore knowledge and enjoy learning. What are the behaviors or characteristics of this person?”**
2. **“The University is interested in identifying those members of our community who help students get actively engaged in their learning (as described in the previous question). Please provide the name of individuals who meet this description, and the role they play (i.e. professor, advisor, mentor, TA, staff member, etc.).”**

A content analysis of a sample of the students' responses (1000 of the 6000) identified 33 characteristics, which are ranked in the chart below, and illustrated in the quotes.

Characteristics of Individuals Who Stimulate Learning



He is so interested in chemistry, and it makes so much sense when he explains. His dedication to his work and his students makes me want to try my best and reach the farthest I can.

MSU's basketball coach- While I have not talked to him personally in depth, anytime that I hear him speak to the Izzone (I am a member) or the general public, he really makes me think and reflect. He opens me up to new ideas and awes me with his class.

Funny, outgoing, positive, insightful, easy to have in-depth conversations with, able to pick up on things that I am passionate about, easy to talk to, very approachable, good at listening to things I have to say, never makes me feel childish for asking questions, always challenging my thoughts without putting me down.

She motivates all our living-learning program students to get involved through example and make a difference in the world. She is understanding and gives many opportunities to discuss ideas and thoughts. She taught me that if you can dream it you can do it.

The floor Mentor is always completing his assignments and studying, and he makes time to be friends with all of us and mentor and run the floor. He is an inspiration.

My roommate is awesome. He is the one that stimulates me to think.

They have a passion for whatever subject they teach which they convey in their actions and words. They also emphasize the knowledge itself, rather than simply the facts.

It's the only class I have where attendance isn't taken, and it's the only class I haven't missed!

They respect the individual students and treat them as adults. They are not condescending or pretentious. They challenge your own beliefs and thoughts in a way that makes you want to learn more. They care about their student's academic well-being. They are excited about sharing their knowledge with their students and in turn, seeing their students grow intellectually.

Over 2000 individuals were specifically mentioned as individuals who were exemplars of these characteristics. Clearly students found these engaging individuals not just in the classroom, but in the Academic Advisors' offices, the Teaching Assistants' tutorials, on the floors with their Resident Mentors and in clubs and organizations. They found them in friends, custodians, student affairs staff, high school teachers and mom and dad. Numerous individuals were mentioned multiple times. Many names were listed which could not be identified, or for whom addresses could not be found. The chart below represents those individuals who were named, and whose names matched an identifiable person in the university directory.

If there is anything I even need my amazing Mentor is always there for me. If I ever need to be motivated for my school work he not only motivates me, he will sit down and take time out of his extremely busy day to help me because that is what is important to him. I am enjoying the college life at Michigan State to the fullest and one of the biggest reasons why, is my Mentor.

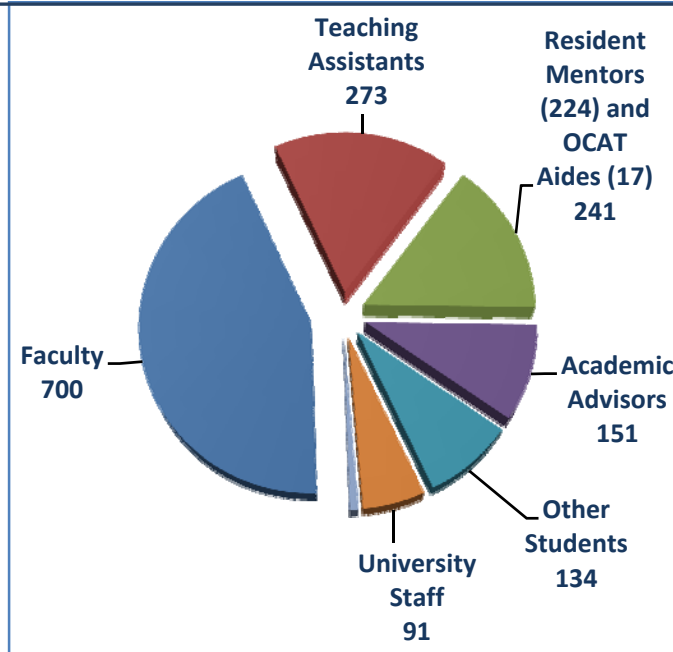
They care about what's going on in and outside of the classroom. They try to relate themselves and the material to the students. They put themselves on an even keel with students and are understanding. They have a good sense of humor and are willing to help the students out, even during their time off.

She stands for excellence; (is) dedicated; makes you think outside the box; GENUINE; no-nonsense; adamant; caring; intelligent; resourceful; honest; trustworthy; (and she) has your best interest @ heart.

He encouraged everyone in his class to think about many different issues and consider opinions even if they weren't your own. He presented each idea as if it were perfectly viable and forced us to either accept or reject the idea through debate. He, more than any of my other professors or advisors, has made me want to learn.

He just absolutely loves what he does, and seems to enjoy teaching marine biology as much as he loves the subject itself. He inspires me to study harder and enjoy what I do because he is just so excited to share his knowledge with us.

I would have to pick my advisor for encouraging me to take education very seriously. He has emphasized the importance of doing well academically as well as showing leadership qualities in order to be accepted into the major.



He is the best TA I've ever had, by far. He goes out of his way to make practice homework for us, is open to answering questions whenever, is more than just helpful, but passionate about helping people. He has a great sense of humor, and is realistic and knowledgeable about college, learning, and use of acquired knowledge in the workforce. He is very honest and encourages all students to study and go to class, but if they don't, he understands and tries to help them with the material regardless. THAT'S a good TA.

These people love what they are doing and they love sharing it with the people around them. This is especially true for professors, but you can also tell when administrators love their job as well. They are always helpful and don't mind taking a little extra time to get to know you or help you with a problem that you are having.

They ask questions that make me think, they talk to me like we're on the same level, and when it matters I know I can tell them things and they won't think less of me but rather try and help me move past it and keep going forward.

Down to earth individual, cares about students, accepts all forms of questions, and is easy to get along with. Always there to lend a helping hand, no matter what day or time, can easily listen to problems and make the situation better.

Cafeteria worker! I always enjoy seeing how passionate she is about her job and most importantly towards the residents. Her great smile and cheerful presence makes going to the cafe a pleasant experience. It's the little things in life that matter the most. Without her, I would definitely not enjoy my meals as much and therefore would be hungry all the time. I would starve and eventually fail all of my classes.

My parents- they are caring, smart, and want the best for me.

Those people who inspire me always tend to be very well informed about the world and open-minded, never judgmental. They are usually smarter than most if not all of the people around them, but don't flaunt it. Or perhaps, even know it.

They can get the message across in a lighthearted way without confusing me. They're funny. It is easy to be interested when you're entertained. I comprehend better when a joke is tied into a fact.

This person is a good listener and takes the time to get to know me. He questions what I say to encourage me to think outside the box. He also has a caring, laid-back attitude that makes our conversations fun.

His class broadens the horizons of my mind on a daily basis. His passion and dedication to literature is phenomenal as well as his desire to teach what is real and what is true. So many professors cannot accomplish that in a classroom with such diverse opinion and people from all walks of life.

They act like it is cool to learn and become involved. They know what students like and play in to that plus stretch students by making them go to things and do things outside of their comfort zone.

They study a lot and are overall pretty smart and on top of school work. They are also fun to go out and party with. So it's really the best of both worlds. I too am a good student, however I believe their good study habits rub off on me in a positive way that encourages me to try harder.

He's always got a smile on his face!