

Classroom Seating Position and College Grades

Research shows that, in all subject areas, the majority of test questions on college exams come from the professor's lectures and that students who take better class notes get better course grades (Brown, 1988; Kierwa, 2000). The method of instruction most commonly used by college and university professors is the *lecture*, whereby the instructor speaks continuously for an extended period of time the students' job is to listen and take notes (Bligh, 2000). The lecture method places great demands on students' ability to listen carefully and take notes that are accurate and complete. Thus, in order to obtain good grades in college, you have to do all that you can to pay close attention during lectures and record lecture information in your notes because that information is likely to show up as questions on exams.

Studies show that students who sit in the *front and center (middle)* of the classroom tend to achieve higher average exam scores (Rennels & Chaudhari, 1988). One study discovered a direct relationship between test scores and seating distance from the front of class: students in the front, middle, and back rows of class scored 80%, 71.6%, and 68.1% respectively on course exams (Giles, 1982). These finding occurs even when students are assigned to these seats by their instructor, which indicates that it is not simply due to the fact that more motivated students tend to sit in the front and center of the room. Instead, the higher academic performance of students sitting front and center is most likely due to the fact that there are learning advantages provided by these seating positions, such as the following:

- 1) better *vision* of the blackboard,
- 2) better *hearing* of what is being said by the instructor,
- 3) better *attention* to what is being said because there are fewer (or no) people between them and the instructor to distract them, and
- 4) greater *eye contact* with the instructor—which may increase their sense of personal responsibility to listen to, and take notes on, what their instructor is saying.

So, when you step into the classroom, give serious thought to where you sit; make a conscious and strategic decision to head to the front of class and center of the class. This is particularly important in large lecture classes because as class size gets larger, each individual tends to feel more anonymous, which may reduce your feelings of personal responsibility and your drive to stay focused and engaged. Thus, in large-class settings, it is especially important to place yourself in a position that maximizes your ability to fight-off distractions and stay involved.

Another advantage to sitting "up close and personal" with your instructor in large lecture classes is that it increases the likelihood that your instructor will know who you. This may work to your advantage at the end of the course if your total points fall in-between two grades: It is more likely that you will be given the benefit of the doubt because the instructor will remember who you and that you sat up front—suggesting that you were an interested and motivated student. Furthermore, if you do well in the instructor's class and the instructor remembers who you, you are well positioned to ask that instructor for a future letter of recommendation.

Lastly, there is one other advantage to sitting in the front of class: You are likely to feel less nervous about asking a question or making a class contribution because there will be no students sitting in front of you to turn around and stare at you when you do!

References

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