



## BOOK REVIEW

### 33 Simple Strategies for Faculty: A Week-By-Week Resource for Teaching First-Year and First-Generation Students

Lisa M. Nunn

*Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019*

*(144 pages, ISBN 978-0-8135-9947-2, \$19.95)*

#### Reviewed By

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Faculty and students often discover that the student transition from high school to college can be challenging. In this book, Lisa Nunn provides a week-by-week outline to guide teachers in thinking about their syllabi, assessment strategies, and pedagogical methods in light of the first-generation college student experience. The book provides small, easily-integrated steps to help students navigate the expectations of college-level work and reinforce faculty support for students.

She begins by exploring the range of preparation, skills, and confidence that first-gen students often bring to campus when they arrive. She bases this on her own research study involving students over their first two years at a public “most selective” university and a private “more selective” one. What emerges is a set of short lessons that help instructors become more reflective of inclusion in their classrooms, based on the words of the students themselves.

Nunn divides up her book into fifteen weeks designed to guide us through the pace of a semester, probing various aspects of experiencing college that correlate with what the student is experiencing at that point in the semester. For instance, week six mentions sharing stress-management strategies with students, at a time when they are probably experiencing their first college midterms.

Each week, Nunn presents a couple of strategies that require no more than fifteen minutes. The introductory chapter gives overall strategies, and the week-by-week chapters give strategies focused on the particular moment of a semester, with emphases on what the students experience at the beginning, middle, and end. Each of these weeks puts their strategies in the context of the first year and first-gen experience, and also provides a short list for further reading or development of particular tools. The emphasis is on student-centered learning, and the book’s brief nature allows us to take these kernels and adapt them as needed into our own college or theological school context.

While many of the strategies can be adopted “on the fly”—such as asking students who come to office hours about how their roommates are doing—the book would serve faculty best as a quick read between semesters. Some of the strategies require pre-term preparation, like having a mini-midterm in week two to allow students to check if their study habits are sufficient for a class.

While this book is meant for any college teacher who has first-year or first-gen students, it is a fresh reminder for us to consider the context we teach in; it will certainly resonate for any of us who teach courses that introduce students to ideas outside their experience, including many of our religious studies and philosophy classes and especially our 100-level intro courses.

Nunn begins by reminding teachers to put ourselves in students’ shoes and see our courses anew, and to think through what a student needs to succeed in our classes in terms of skills, knowledge, and assessment. Ultimately, the strategies shared in this book are intended to make the instructor, the course design, and the topics taught more approachable to a wider variety of students. What really shines through in this book is that when teachers spend the time to consider class design and classroom experience in light of student-centered learning, we often find ourselves more supportive of the many diverse communities which we seek to engage.