

Christians in the Classroom: How can I share my faith with my professor?

As a college student, you have three ways to immediately influence a classroom environment towards spiritual truth. You don't have to pass out fliers about Jesus or wear a t-shirt that showcases Bible verses. You don't have to stand up and challenge the professor to a duel of wits.

by Heather Holleman, Ph.D., Adjunct Professor, Penn State University

You just have to fully engage.

Fully engaged students showcase *character*, build class *community*, and foster genuine academic *conversation*. When a Christian student models these three things, that person sows seeds for the gospel and opens wide the door for spiritual truth. I see it every semester.

A fully engaged student displays the kind of *character* that professors and other students pay attention to. One semester, I had a Christian student who arrived late for nearly every class. She was bleary eyed from the night before, and she acted bored and entitled the entire semester. She turned in papers late, never spoke, and never once approached me in office hours. Another student (not a Christian), arrived to class early, had his notes spread out in front of him, and greeted me as I arrived to teach. He had questions prepared for class discussions and drafts written before the deadline. He was alert, eager, and courteous. So engaged was this student that I had to ask what motivated him to be this way. *What was his secret?* Can you imagine if that student was a Christian and could tell his professor how Jesus helps him live with excellence?

A fully engaged student also builds class *community*. Whether she's in a 400 student lecture hall or a 15 student seminar, a Christian student can challenge herself to meet the people around her, invite them to study groups, and foster connection. She might arrive early to make conversation with students and then leave late to invite students to lunch. Last semester, I had a student plan a dinner party for our class and invite us all bowling. Another semester, I had a student invite the class to breakfast, and they insisted I join them. A few weeks ago, a Jewish student asked me if she could treat my family to homemade latkes for Hanukkah. She came to my home with her menorah and Hebrew blessings.

As community forms, students start to share their lives. When students start to share their lives, the gospel naturally enters in. As a professor invited to a student outing, I wanted to learn what my students did outside of my class. I wanted to hear about their interests. Can you imagine if Christian students could share with their professors about

their Bible study, their worship service at church, or their campus outreach event? When community forms, these times of sharing can happen.

Finally, a fully engaged student fosters genuine academic *conversation*. Whether he's in an engineering class or a poetry workshop, a Christian student might always ask the question, "How does this course material teach me more about Jesus? How did that lecture resonate with the spiritual truths found in scripture? How does this information usher me into worship as I consider the wonder of this research? If a student came to my office hours to have a real conversation about how my syllabus intersected with his faith or philosophy of living, I would listen and learn. I would want to know more. No professor I know can resist a student who wants to have a conversation about how the course matters to them.

Character, community, and conversation: These aspects of being a Christian in a college classroom can transform a lecture hall into a mission field ripe for spiritual discussion.

Heather Holleman, Ph.D., teaches advanced writing at Penn State and helps direct the graduate student and faculty ministry there. She blogs daily at Live with Flair www.livewithflair.blogspot.com