

SAIL Program to Focus on Improving Student Learning

University Relations ? Communications
August 2016

Using a highlighting pen as a form of studying is now a thing of the past, or, according to more and more research, it should be. Studies show that some of the ways students have traditionally learned and studied aren't as effective as they were once thought to be.

The UA's new SAIL program, which stands for Student Advocates for Improved Learning, aims to help faculty and students understand effective strategies that can improve student learning and enhance retention. Students in the program will take a one-credit course this semester to learn these strategies and will then be tasked with coaching other students on the same techniques.

"The science of learning tells us that there are good ways and not-so-good ways to learn, and unfortunately a lot of students use strategies that aren't terribly effective," said **Jane Hunter**, director of academic resources and special projects with the Office of Academic Affairs. "So, what we're trying to do is get that message out. The way we can do that is by using students, because they can communicate with their peers many times more effectively than we as instructors can communicate with them. That's our strategy."

The idea for the program came from a book called "Make It Stick," which offers techniques for more productive learning and studying. The book covers effective learning techniques that allow students to retain information long after the material has been taught.

The SAIL program is part of the UA Learning Initiative, which **Gail Burd**, senior vice provost for academic affairs, worked to get approved by the Higher Learning Commission. The initiative, which focuses on enhancing student learning, includes faculty and student components, which Burd thinks is an important factor.

"I think the SAIL program was needed because we realized that teaching faculty to be better teachers is only half the story," Burd said. "One really needs to work with the students to help them be better learners."

The 22 students in the program are called SAIL fellows and are taught by **Debra Tomanek**, professor of molecular and cellular biology, along with Hunter. The course will include instruction on techniques that are mentioned in the "Make It Stick" book.

SAIL fellows will focus on several key principles to improve student learning, such as self-quizzing, connecting concepts, engaging during class, collaborating with peers, explaining concepts with peers and spacing out study sessions. Watch this [video](#) ^[1] to learn more about some of the concepts the SAIL fellows will be emphasizing.

"We're trying to create a group of students who can both advocate for, and be successful in, communicating the importance of using these principles of learning that we know work," Tomanek said.

After the SAIL fellows are prepared, they will collaborate with different departments and groups on campus and work closely with **Faculty Fellows** ^[2] to reach students who would benefit from knowing how to improve their learning and studying skills.

John Pollard, associate professor of practice in chemistry and biochemistry, will play a key role, serving as the Faculty Fellow for the SAIL program.

Pollard will initiate contact between the SAIL fellows and Faculty Fellows to connect the SAIL fellows to groups of students who are already reaching out for help. Pollard says the response from Faculty Fellows wanting to be part of the program has been positive.

"The one very interesting thing about the faculty in this SAIL program is that they also happen to be some of the most innovative and talented educators on campus," Pollard said. "Because of this, they care very deeply about student learning, and any programming that supports this is going to be popular amongst the fellows."

The hope is that the SAIL fellows will reach a variety of student groups to get the word out about better learning and study habits, and eventually make improved learning a campuswide effort.

"We want our students to be expert learners, and that means knowing more about how learning happens," Tomanek said.

Source URL: https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/sail-program-focus-improving-student-learning?utm_source=PANTHEON_STRIPPED&utm_medium=PANTHEON_STRIPPED&utm_campaign=PANTHEON_STRIPPED

Links

[1]

http://streaming.oia.arizona.edu/clientFlashABR/play.php?clipname=/perm/take_charge_learning/web.smil&autoplay=1

[2] <http://saem-aiss.arizona.edu/sr-vp/faculty-programs/faculty-fellows>