

Advance Questions for Stonehill College Workshop  
October 11, 2011

We are very much looking forward to working with you at Academic Development Day next week. We will be sharing with you some of the processes that we have been using on our campus to find new ways to increase student learning. Since the process will be most effective if we work with challenges that emerge directly from your teaching, we suggest that you do just a little “homework” in advance of the session. We would like you to think of one or two “bottlenecks” to learning in one of your undergraduate courses, i.e. places where significant numbers of students find it difficult to master something that is important for success in the class. (On the next page we have provided a couple of examples of bottlenecks defined by faculty in our program.)

When you have defined a bottleneck or two, we would very much appreciate your emailing them to us at [dpace44@gmail.com](mailto:dpace44@gmail.com). That will give us an opportunity to shape the workshop to meet your needs.

It would also be helpful, if you devoted a few minutes to thinking about what steps a student would have to take to get past each bottleneck. Most often the first efforts to do this are couched in disciplinary jargon that may be unintelligible to many students. So the process will be most effective, if you keep asking yourself “But how does one do that?” until you have come up with clearly defined steps couched in everyday speech. Don’t worry if you get stuck in the process. That is generally a sign that you are on the right track, and we will be working together at the workshop to complete this process of definition.

Thank you for your time. We look forward to meeting you on the 11th.

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## Examples of Bottlenecks

### Biology

**Vague:** Students have difficulty moving from fact learning to a deeper understanding of biological processes

**More Useful:** Students have difficulty visualizing chromosomes, appreciating the distinction between similar and identical chromosomes (i.e., homologs and sister chromatids), and predicting their segregation patterns during mitosis and meiosis.

### English:

**Vague:** Students cannot interpret texts.

**Useful:** "Students in literature classes have a particular problem in the basic approach to textual interpretation. Students forever want to go directly to interpreting a text without first getting a good grasp of a text's content. They need to observe before they interpret, but they are constantly skipping a thoughtful observation stage. Skipping this stage leads to poor interpretations." (This observation is specific enough and provides enough information that it can serve as a starting place for the analysis of the bottleneck.)

### Marketing:

Consumer decision making is a central part of the marketing strategy course. While students generally understand how consumers make decisions, they are not able to reverse perspective and think like a marketing manager. In particular, students do not know how to use this information to design actions that would influence consumer decisions.

### History:

Students do not know how to distinguish what should be remembered in a secondary work in history from what can be safely forgotten.

### Physics

The students need to be able to take forces that do not lie on the xy plane and break them up into their x and y components.

### Economics

Stereotypes from the everyday life interfere with learning about price and quantity relationship in firms and consumer-decision making processes.