

Education Review

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Gooblar, D. (2025). *One classroom at a time: How better teaching can make college more equitable*. Harvard University Press.

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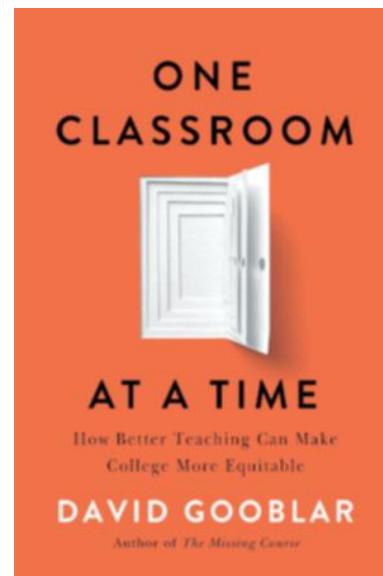
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Increasingly, Generation Z and now Generation Alpha are asking whether they belong in higher education. Low higher education enrollment and retention numbers are requiring institutions to reflect on what they are doing to not only recruit students but also retain them. Retention is no longer simply a recruitment or singular office initiative. To retain Generation Z and Generation Alpha, requires a full team of university professionals, which engages the heart of the institution—the class and its faculty.

With an interest in American literature, higher education, gender, race, and university teaching, **David Gooblar** identifies the need for faculty teaching reform in his latest book, *One Classroom at a Time*. It is evident that Gooblar has a passion for college access for all, specifically marginalized communities. His intended audience is naturally higher education professionals, specifically faculty of all experiences. The text asks the reader to reflect on their own practices and how we can continue to develop so that we can create an accessible learning environment for all learners.

Gooblar's primary problem for consideration is that higher education institutions are "struggling to provide an equitable education to a diverse student body" (p. 4). Higher education is open for all to apply and enroll, but that does not equate to all having equitable access to content or a good chance to succeed in higher education. For this reason, race, gender, class, disability, and demographic characteristics remain indicators for student persistence and success. Success and persistence in higher education remain tailored for the privileged.

The author shares that increasingly, much of the undergraduate student body is living below the poverty line. Students cannot simply direct all their attention to the classroom; to survive, they must pursue multiple jobs to make ends meet. The current American higher education student body is in survival mode. Engaging



students who are in survival mode requires intentional engagement. Gooblar examines what this intentional engagement looks like in the classroom.

He provides strategies for faculty in an effort to promote equitable access to academic success. Before engaging the reader with his *10 Principles of Equitable Pedagogical Practice* and *10 Recommendations for Institutions*, Gooblar makes clear that the reader must understand essential student development theories. He initiates this discussion by introducing the reader to the importance of academic belonging. Students, specifically marginalized students, may come to the classroom with previous inequitable experiences that led to their hyperconscious understanding of stereotypes associated with their identity. Their awareness of these stereotypes can erect a barrier to academic access. For example, a student might look around the classroom and see that they are the only Latine student in the room and therefore believe that their voice will not be heard. It is essential to establish in the classroom that the Latine and all students know that although they have varying experiences with education, they, in fact, do belong there. This step goes beyond an inclusive poster on the classroom wall. It begins with a faculty inventory of their students' current stasis. Gooblar encourages the reader to ask their students what their responsibilities outside the class are, how many hours they work, and whether they are their primary provider. He believes that if faculty take time to learn and understand the circumstances of their students' lives, they will promote a stronger sense of belonging. He adds that the syllabus is the prime instrument to make clear to students what the leader values and how they value their students.

Gooblar reiterates the importance of a student and faculty growth-mindset culture. With the rise in socio-emotional learning in the K-12 space—however, given the current political state, this shift may change as districts adjust their stance on socio-emotional learning—Generation Z and Generation Alpha are aware of growth-mindset tools. But are the faculty whose classes they are entering aware? Gooblar makes clear that faculty who remain “stuck” in the understanding that a higher education student looks a certain way will indeed lose student engagement. Faculty are the university's representatives, and if the students see that they are not adaptive, why would the students attempt to adapt?

Albeit dated, the literature on student engagement in higher education classrooms is readily available. One might consider Vincent Tinto, Alexander Astin, or George Kuh when thinking about student engagement in the higher education space. These thinkers established the importance of belonging and integrating the student in the higher education space. Yet as Gooblar makes clear, the application is not always implemented. Gooblar approaches the reality of current education and calls the readers to reach for teaching excellence by actual application of these theorists' work. He does so by offering digestible and actionable steps for faculty to apply, such as his *10 Principles of Equitable Pedagogical Practice* and *10 Recommendations for Institutions*.

As a former K-12 educator, I believe that Gooblar is not presenting a radical new school of thought. Rather, he is connecting foundational teaching practices to a space that has long neglected the very developmental skill that faculty were called to do, viz., teach. Gooblar's *10 Practices of Equitable Pedagogical Practices* mirror culturally relevant teaching. He recommends that faculty commit to helping every student

learn, work to earn students' trust, get to know their students, invite students' to bring their lives into the classroom, and plan for diversity. One might find these pillars in a class that implements culturally relevant practices. Culturally relevant teaching requires educators to listen to and apply students' lived experiences in the classroom and value diversity. This form of teaching promotes student engagement by building relationships with students and promoting critical thought. The classroom is an interactive space where the teacher and student engage with each other to create a holistic learning space.

Gooblar's five other practices, viz., build a predictable/transparent structure, create a growth mindset culture, normalize struggle, downplay competition, and provide wise feedback, are unique additions to culturally relevant teaching, which enhance the student experience.

What current literature centered on engaging students in the classroom lacks is awareness of today's political climate. Current research on belonging and engagement in higher education relies on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), which, in many places, are becoming taboo terms on campuses. In his concluding statement, Gooblar finally addressed what many higher education educators, including myself, were wondering: How do we facilitate inclusive and academic belonging spaces in states that have warned educators to steer clear of inclusive practices? He acknowledges that since he began writing the text, his own state Iowa, has passed anti-DEI laws. Although terms and organizational support for certain identities have changed, he makes clear that inclusive work can still happen. Gooblar's principles are meant to facilitate an equitable space for all learners. Although his concluding chapter lends itself to the modern climate, the text would be stronger if there were tools for academics to address creating inclusive classrooms in this climate throughout the text. *One Classroom at a Time* provides tangible tools for educators to enhance and engage the classroom for all learners to succeed in higher education. As a new generation of educators enters the college classroom, this text could establish the standard for engaging the classroom and should be a foundational text for new faculty.

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About the Reviewer

Chloé López Ridenour is a doctoral student in Utah State University's Curriculum and Instruction program, with an emphasis in cultural studies. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science, with minors in women and gender studies and justice studies, as well as a master's degree in elementary education. A Teach For America Phoenix alum, she has experience with alternative



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About the Author

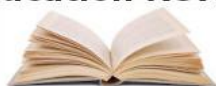
David Gooblar holds a PhD in English (2008) from the University College London. He is an Associate Professor of English and Director of General Education Literature at the University of Iowa. Gooblar oversees about 150 sections of the Interpretation of Literature (ENGL:1200). This course introduces around 3000 Iowa undergraduates to the mysteries of literary reading every year and plays a vital role in helping scores of graduate instructors become better teachers. He is the author of *The Missing Course: Everything They Never Told You about College Teaching*.



From 2013-2020, he wrote a column on college teaching for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. He writes occasional pieces at his newsletter, *Pedagogy Unbound*, <https://pedagogyunbound.beehiiv.com/>.

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